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["I WISH I HAD NEVER SEEN YOU, FOR YOU HAVE SPOILED THE WHOLE WORLD FOR ME!" SAID JUSTIN, BITTERLY.]

## A WOODLAND NYMPH.

### [A NOVELETTE.]

#### CHAPTER I.

JUSTIN BRANSCOMBE frowned: he had moored his boat in this sequestered spot in the hope of enjoying perfect quiet, whilst he dipped deeply into the latest mathematical work; and now he must forbear to be disturbed by prolonged peals of girlish laughter.

He glanced towards the shady woods with most marked disapproval; why, if folks must picnic, did they not choose some other spot? And as he thought this he heard the rush of feet, light as those of a hare, the rippling laughter came nearer and nearer, and suddenly he saw amongst the greenery the slim figure of a young girl, pursued by two companions.

She looked like a woodland nymph in her white gown, with her dark hair loose upon her shoulders, and her riant face all aglow with health and merriment. That she had not seen

him was very evident; but the foremost of her pursuers catching a glimpse of a manly figure drew hastily back, an example which the second quickly followed, and the solitary girl remained.

She cried out her defiance; and then Justin guessed that she had been notified of his presence, for all at once she bent her face fully upon him. The brown eyes full of grave inquiry were fixed upon him steadily a moment, with all the unconscious curiosity of a child; then, slowly lessening the bough she had drawn before her eyes, she turned away almost as swiftly as she had come. But through the stillness of the summer air her words reached him, for her voice was of a singularly pure character.

"What a nuisance summer tourists are! one falls upon them in all sorts of places; they are ubiquitous."

"But, Aileen," another voice remonstrated.

"But me no bats," interrupted the first speaker, and then silence once more reigned supreme, and, with scarcely another thought to the girl, Justin returned to his book.

But she was destined to cross his path again

that day; he had lunched and then strolled from the farmhouse where he boarded to the high road beyond, looking for the advent of the mail, when he heard the clatter of horse's hoofs, and saw an animal and rider coming towards him at apparently perilous speed.

Suddenly the capious wind veered round, and, making free with the girl's hat, blew it in Justin's direction. It was the work of a moment to secure it, but he had to wait some time before the pony could be brought to a standstill, and then, with a grave bow presenting it to her, he said,—

"Pardon me, but isn't it a trifle foolhardy to ride at such a pace?"

The brown eyes met his very frankly, and with a curious unwillingness he acknowledged to himself that they were lovely.

"Foolhardy!" said the girl; "oh! Spitfire is as safe as a carthorse—with me; and I hate going slowly. Thank you so much," as she received and adjusted her hat; "it was so kind of you to take so much trouble on my account," and with a gracious smile she rode away, whilst Justin returned to the farmhouse.

Mrs. Linger, the farmer's wife, had witnessed the whole occurrence, and now she said,—

"That's Miss Fitzroy, sir. I think you said you had letters of introduction to her father? Well, sir, you'll find him a nice pleasant gentleman, although he hasn't a thought beyond Miss Aileen, and there's small wonder in that, seeing he's only got her. She is such a lovely young lady too, sir."

"Is she?" he answered, without enthusiasm. "I had not noticed."

"Oh, they call her the Beauty of Brooklands; she deserves the name."

"She seems a trifle wild and hoydenish."

"She is fond of fun, it is true, sir; and as wilful as she possibly can be; but, then, that is her father's fault, he has always spoiled her; but we would not like to have Miss Aileen altered in any way."

"It always appears to me spoiled children are obnoxious and overbearing."

"Miss Fitzroy is the nicest, most unassuming young lady I know. I wish I could speak as highly for the Vicar's lady and daughters. She is a great heiress, sir; but I don't believe she ever gives a thought to her money, she is just like a happy child."

Then, seeing her boarder was apparently satisfied with Miss Aileen's praises, she hurried away to her never-ending duties, and Justin thought a little laxity of the girl, who, despite her beauty, had not impressed him very favourably.

"She is a flippant little thing," he said, "and her flippancy passes here for friendliness and good nature. I have a good mind not to present Thurley's letters, because I may run a risk of meeting her. I suppose she is lovely, and, of course, she knows it, and will expect every man she meets to pay her pretty compliments; and I can't make small talk. I don't think I will go."

But on the following morning he presented himself at Fitzroy Manor, and was graciously received by its owner, a white-bearded venerable man, who had the look of an invalid.

"Ah!" he said, "Thurley is one of my eldest and most esteemed friends—for his sake I welcome you most heartily, and for your own. He speaks so highly of your acquirements that I am proud to know you. You will lunch with us, I hope, it is so rarely one meets an Oxford man down here, and my health forbids me leaving home."

With many thanks Justin Branscombe declined the proffered hospitality; but Mr. Fitzroy so pressed him at last to dine with him and spend a pleasant evening, that it would have been discourteous to refuse.

So at six o'clock he went once again to the Manor, feeling annoyed with himself for doing so; because, if the truth must be told, the young Oxford tutor had little love for society in general, and still less for feminine companionship.

He had even grown to despise women as a class. They had no minds, he would say, or if by chance they possessed such a commodity, they were so over-anxious to make good their claim to the whole world that they became unbearable.

Miss Fitzroy did not receive him, and her father smiled indulgently over her lack of punctuality.

"We will not wait for Aileen," he said; "the child takes little count of time, and we are quite used to her ways. This is not a household that moves with the precision of clockwork; even our meals are movable feasts."

So they sat down together, and presently there came the light fall of swift feet, the rustle of a woman's skirts, and a voice that cried,—

"Oh, dad! I am late again. I, who promised reformation;" and then she stood in the open doorway blushing, and ever so little confused to meet the stranger's grave eyes.

She had forgotten all about her father's informal invite. To her Justin Branscombe was but a unit, and, at present, he did not

interest her. But she underwent the ceremony of introduction with a gracious ease many a society woman might envy, it was so natural; and she smiled as she slipped into her seat, saying,—

"Mr. Branscombe and I have met before, dad. He was good enough to restore my hat to me, and," with a mischievous glance from behind the *épergne* "to remonstrate with me upon my foolhardy riding."

"Do you often indulge in such violent exercise?" asked Justin, with lazy curiosity.

"Oh, yes; though sometimes Spitfire and I travel at a snail's pace. That is when I have a good and methodical mood upon me; but usually we are as you saw us yesterday. Spitfire knows all my moods, and is obliging enough to accommodate herself to me."

"You are fortunate in the possession of such an intelligent beast;" and then he began to talk with his host on matters of common interest, until he almost forgot the presence of the girl, for she made not the slightest attempt to join in the conversation; and when at last he turned with an apology upon his lips for his forgetfulness, he did not utter it, because the look on her face, in her deep brown eyes, showed she had been an intelligent and appreciative listener.

"Thank you for an intellectual treat," she said, in her soft voice. "You have given dad and I a very happy hour. There are so few people round Brooklands who really care for literature."

And then before he could reply she was gone; but he began to feel a distinct interest in this girl of seventeen, who, with all her love of fun and frolic, was yet capable of appreciating the very things he held most dear.

When they joined her in the drawing-room she was playing, and as Justin afterwards said, "playing divinely," one of Beethoven's divine sonatas.

Now music was Justin's one passion, and he moved instantly to her side. She continued playing without so much as glancing at him. It pleased him to see she was totally without self-consciousness, and wholly wrapped in the beauty of the strains of melody which flooded the room.

She gave a little sigh when she had ended, and then, for the first time, recognising his presence, apologised quaintly for her "very cavalier reception;" but he urged her to say no more, thanking her for the pleasure she had given him, and begging she would not cease. But she, with a pretty wilfulness which was part and parcel of her nature, said,—

"I will play no more unless you contribute to my amusement. Do you sing, Mr. Branscombe?"

He confessed he did, and instantly the little white hands thrust a whole pile of loose music towards him. From it he selected "Adélie," and presently his mellow tenor was rising to her sympathetic accompaniment.

It was a favourite song of hers, and as he sang the closing words with more of passion than he was aware, every pulse in that lithe young body throbbed to the words and music.

"Soon, O wonder, a flow'r upon my grave shall glitter  
With thy name, Adélie."

"Thank you," said Aileen, at the conclusion, "I am your debtor."

She had all a child's frankness and innocence, united to a womanly dignity beyond her years. It filled Justin with something like wonder. He did not yet know that her life had been ordered in such a fashion as to make her unlike society girls.

She had never had a resident governess; masters had come and gone, teaching her those arts for which she showed aptitude; but in all other things her father had been her only tutor, and all her days being spent with him, she had grown wise in many matters, whilst as simple as a child in others.

"There is more in her than I believed," thought Justin, and his eyes were very friendly as they rested upon her.

As she met that friendly gaze she laughed lightly.

"I believe we may be good comrades," she said, with a swift glance from beneath her long lashes, "although when we have met previously you have been very much inclined to act the severe mentor to me. What a frown you wore when I disturbed your reading, but you know you had absolutely no right to be in those waters; and then, again, when you gave assistance yesterday, it was given 'grudgingly and of necessity,' not because you thought I deserved it. But," as the colour mounted to his swarthy cheeks, "I freely forgive you all, because you rendered 'Adélie' as it ought to be rendered."

This was said without the faintest hint of flattery. It was only the outspoken pleasure and praise of a child; and dismissing the subject with a rapidity which was as startling as it was natural, she went on,—

"You must see my lilies. They are just now at perfection, so golden and white, so heavy scented, that I could linger about them all day, and it is positive grief to me to see them fade. Come!"

Mr. Fitzroy laughed.

"Aileen is in the imperative mood and must be obeyed; as for me, I prefer remaining here. I have had too much experience of rheumatism to court it again."

So Justin followed the girl through the French window. It was a divine night, the air so soft and sweet with the scent of flowers. In the wood beyond, the nightingales were making mad melody; a miniature waterfall tinkled close by, whilst

"Fading flecks of bright opalescence,  
But faintly dappled a saffron sky."

Aileen gave a sigh of pure and utter delight.

"Don't talk if you wish to be silent," she said, in a very low voice, "the night is too good for speech."

In silence they walked to her great bed of lilies, and there she spoke again.

"Shall I give you some? your eyes say yes," and the delicate hands began gently to gather the exquisite blossoms. "Will you think me a very dreadful young woman when I say I hate to see my favourite flowers in the hands of those horrid saints in the National Gallery? I like best to associate them with Rossetti's 'Blessed Damosel'; you know, in his vision,—

"She had three lilies in her hand,  
And the stars in her hair were seven."

Justin turned to look at her; she was standing with her hands flower-filled, a mystic light in her lovely eyes, and for the first time in his life his heart beat a little faster because of a girl's beauty, a girl's presence. He was inclined to be angry with himself that this was so, but, when with her pretty smile she gave her treasures into his keeping, that vague sense of annoyance left him.

Long they lingered together in the garden, and to his amazement and delight Justin found this little country-bred girl knew something of all his favourite authors and poets. She had read Carlyle and Arnold until their writings were as familiar to her as household words. Longfellow and Tennyson had been the first loves of her early days; William and Lewis Morris, Swinburne and Shakespeare divided the honours in her later affections.

"It has been one of my happiest evenings," Justin said as he parted with her. "I am honest enough to confess I rather dreaded it. I did not know the treat in store for me; I cannot sufficiently thank you, Miss Fitzroy, for the pleasure you have given me. But if I could in any way express my gratitude—"

"You can prove it," laughed Aileen with a bewildering glance. "If I dare ask a favour

in return for any fancied kindness on my father's part or mine, I would beg you to row me down the river to the wood—dad never was an oarsman, and I could not manage ever to learn the splendid craft."

"I shall come up for you to-morrow," he said, and all that night his dreams were haunted by little wild Aileen Fitzroy.

## CHAPTER II.

The big boat rocked lazily on the waters, and from amongst the crimson cushions Aileen as lazily gave utterance to her saucy speeches. She and Justin had now been almost inseparable companions for a whole blissful fortnight. The man knew in his heart that she had grown dearer to him than he had ever dreamed any girl could be; she felt happy in a tremulous half-frightened way when he came, and restless when he went, but not to even herself had she yet confessed "I love him," and Mr. Fitzroy was blind to their dawning passion.

"I think," said Aileen, "it would be a nice and kindly act to read to me. I am too lazy to read myself."

"I never encourage indolence in the young," responded Justin with admirable gravity, "and I was on the point of proposing you should sing 'Sweethearts' for my edification."

"Singing is altogether out of the question with the thermometer at ninety in the shade; have you mercy?"

"It is a woman's duty to minister to a man's pleasure," laughed Justin, and Aileen as quickly retorted, with the most saucy of smiles,—

"Oh, that is an exploded idea; the comic papers have cured us of such folly, because according to their showing the woman loves fashion before everything, and is in the habit of treating her husband less kindly than she would her dog; she knows nothing that she should, and everything she should not."

Justin's laughter broke in upon her words.

"Henceforth I abjure all comic journals; but really this grows interesting. I had no idea you were great at lecturing."

She leaned forward with the prettiest pout, and her eyes were full of laughter, as she said,—

"You have disappointed me. I thought you were above the failings of your very self-loving sex; if it were not so hot I would be angry."

"With me?"

And now he had possession of her hands and was looking into her face so earnestly, so ardently that she flushed, trembled, and was afraid of her own motion.

"Would you be angry with me, Aileen? Ah! you little wild thing, I will not let you go until you have answered."

With a very evident effort she met his glance.

"Oh, yes. Why should I not be angry with you?"

"Because, Aileen, I am your friend; and I hope one day to be more. Do you remember, I wonder, every incident of our—our friendship as I do? The day and the manner in which I first saw you—that first evening at your home, and your kindness to one who had shown no kindness to you?"

She answered bravely,—

"I remember all."

"You are young," Justin went on, "very young, and I am a man of thirty. Nothing would be more natural than you should laugh at me when I tell you I love you with all my heart!"

"I do not laugh," she whispered back.

"Then you will let me hope that one day soon I may ask you a question, and the answer shall be all that I desire?"

The clear cut face, instinct with love, was so near her own that his breath lifted the little rings of hair about her brow. She gave a quick, convulsive shudder.

"Do not press for a reply now. I am so young—wait a little while; I would not have any mistake now—I would not hurt you in the future."

"Aileen, I am going away to-morrow. In a month I shall return. Do you think you will be ready then with your reply?"

"Yes," she murmured, "oh, yes! But must you go?"

"It is unavoidable. Won't you let me take some consolation with me?"

She was silent a moment. Then she said under her breath,—

"I—I think you may hope; but it is all so new and strange, and I must have time for thought. You are not angry with me?"

"No; you would have to sin very badly against me to make me harsh towards you. And see, sweetheart, I will not even ask you to write me whilst I am away. I leave myself wholly in your hands, only praying you will be merciful in your remembrance of me."

She was very pale as she drew her fingers from his clasp. Her soul was shaken to its centre; and, although she would fain have given him her promise then, she was loath to let the happy days of her childhood slip out of her grasp.

"Be patient," she said, gently, "and I will try to answer as you wish; but I promise nothing. Perhaps you only fancy you love me, and I—well, I scarcely know my own mind yet; but we shall learn in a month."

He bowed gravely.

"I will not urge you further. Perhaps I have spoken too prematurely—if so, I have but myself to blame."

And then, taking the oars, he rowed her towards home. Only when he had assisted her to land, in that well-remembered wood, he could not let her go without some sign of love.

"May I kiss you—once, Aileen?" he asked, and although she shivered a little, she suffered him to draw her closer and press his lips to hers; then she slipped out of his arms with a murmured "good-by" and so was lost to him for a long, long month.

Trembling with a new-born happiness, half wishing she had answered even as he prayed, Aileen sped through the brambles across the lawn and into the big old hall.

It struck her that there was a curious quietude about the house, and that Pedley, the antiquated footman, looked strangely at her. A vague sense of coming trouble was upon her as she went into her father's presence, and it was not lessened by the expression of his white, pinched face.

There was a stranger with him, and Aileen would have withdrawn at once, but Mr. Fitzroy detained her by a gesture.

"My dear," he said, faintly, "this is your cousin Seth."

She looked at him with wide eyes, having no knowledge of any living relative, and she was not favourably impressed by the young man's appearance—he was such a typical American. But as he rose and offered a long, lean hand, she could do no less than suffer him to touch the tips of her fingers.

"I did not know I had any cousins," she said, coldly.

"But you know it now," remarked the new-found one, he said "now," "and I hope we shall 'cotton' to each other."

She moved nearer to her father.

"Perhaps you will tell me, papa, how this—this gentleman makes good his claim to relationship with us?"

"Bless me," broke in the American, "you're as practical as you're pretty, and that's saying a good deal. Look here, uncle, I'll do all the explaining. This is how it stands, cousin: I am Seth Fitzroy, only son of Bamfyld Fitzroy, and Amanda his wife, and these papers will prove it to anyone's satisfaction."

"With your permission," Mr. Fitzroy remarked, wearily, "I will explain all to my daughter later on. Aileen, let us go to dinner."

It was a quiet and wretched meal to two of

the trio, because, loving her father so dearly, Aileen guessed all his moods, and felt that this cousin's advent boded ill for him; and Mr. Fitzroy scarcely knew how he could break his evil tidings to the child of his love.

Dinner being ended, Seth rose with the remark that he would "go and look after his traps," and so father and daughter were left alone.

The former threw out his arms with a tragic gesture, and, in a broken voice, said,—

"Oh, Aileen! oh, my dear little Aileen! most bitter trouble has befallen us."

"So long as we have each other, the worst has not come," she answered, firmly, although her lips and cheeks were white.

"You do not understand," he groaned, "and oh, my little one, it breaks my heart to tell you. We are dethroned, you and I; we have no longer any right to remain here—all along we have been usurpers."

She began to tremble, but she would not fail her dear and honoured father in the hour of trial, so she said, still steadily,—

"This man, Seth Fitzroy, pretends to claim what we believed so long to be ours. Upon what does he base his claim?"

"Oh, what do details matter?" perversely. "He's proved that I am an impostor, and he is the lawful owner of the Manor."

"I don't believe it. Take courage, dear; we will fight this out together."

"There is no use in fighting; he has right upon his side."

"Then," said Aileen, indignantly, "why has he been so long in asking for his own? Who and what is he?"

"He is what he professes to be; his papers prove that. My dear, years and years ago, your uncle Bamfyld was guilty of such a grave sin that it was necessary for him to leave England secretly. He went to America, and we heard from him at intervals for a period of perhaps three years; but his letters were unsatisfactory and your grandfather did not encourage him to give any details of his life—he never held up his head after Bamfyld's shame, because, you see, he was his favourite son, being the first-born. Well, three months before he died, there came a message from Boston to the effect that the 'black sheep' was no more, and we could not grieve. Of course, his death placed me in the position of heir, and a little later I took possession of the estates. I don't know what Bamfyld's motive was for deceiving us; perhaps he felt it better to die to his old life and associates. However that may be, he married, and Seth is the issue of that marriage; but not even to his wife did he divulge the secret of his true position, and she was so far from suspecting it, that the papers he left behind were a revelation to her. Of course she lost no time in consulting a solicitor, they had been living in comparative poverty, and he advised her to send her son over to investigate the matter. I have seen the documents. We should be mad to dispute his claim. Oh, Aileen, Aileen! it is hard. I hoped to end my days in the home of my forefathers, but that privilege is denied me now!"

She drew the poor grey head down upon her breast. "It is hard my darling," she said, "but we may still be together."

"You don't understand," he groaned: "if Seth Fitzroy is a hard man, he can compel me to refund the revenues of all these years. That would more than swallow up my little property inherited from my mother, and leave us helpless and penniless in a hard world. I am too old to work; you, my child, are all unfitted by your life and education for a hand-to-hand fight with poverty and care."

She had grown very white, and her heart was like lead in her breast; but she was strong for his sake. All his life he had ministered to her happiness; it was her duty now to think only of his comfort. With her slender young arms about him, she prayed him to

take courage, promising to intercede with her cousin on his behalf—though, indeed, she shrank from such a task. And he, being weak and old, broke utterly down, sobbing like a little child; and she lovingly soothed and ministered to him until he fell into a profound sleep. Then with a sigh she rose, and, crossing to the window, went out into the moonlit gardens. Was it true? This morning she had been the petted heiress, favoured of the gods, with friends more than she could count; to-night she was as penniless as the poorest village maid if Seth Fitzroy chose to exact his "pound of flesh;" "and," she mused bitterly, "perhaps like riches, my friends will take wings to themselves. Oh! I would not care so much for myself; but—but—father! father! this is too cruel for you to bear and live."

And then she thought of Justin Branscombe and the words he had spoken; would he remember them now that she was poor, and because he loved her, give a shelter and a welcome to her father? And as she thought thus a strident voice with a nasal twang said, "Hey, cousin! star-gazing are you? Well, I reckon I can't do better than join you."

The red blood flamed into her face, and her eyes flashed angrily.

"I wish to be alone," she said, frigidly.

"Oh, yes, I know," he retorted, with American assurance; "but we've got to get acquainted, so we can't begin too soon. Look here, I ain't a bad sort of fellow if you don't rub me the wrong way, and I ain't going to be hard on the old chap."

"May I inquire who the 'old chap' is?" asked Aileen, with a disdainful look. "At present your language is—somewhat puzzling."

"On, I say, none of that. The old chap is your governor, of course; and don't you treat me badly, and you won't have cause to complain. It's natural you shouldn't be overjoyed to see me, but I mean to act fair and square with you, if you'll only be reasonable. This place is mine, and I should be a fool to let it go. I could make things pretty rough for you and the old—the governor but just you look here! I'm inclined to do the generous; if you and—and uncle like to stay on, you may, and we won't say anything about the expenses. Of course, uncle can put me straight with the big guns round here, and you can polish up the old woman—my mother, you know—she ain't exactly a society lady," with a burst of laughter.

Aileen drew away from him; his coarseness and assurance disgusted her; but for her father's sake she contrived to say, with tolerable civility.—

"Then Mrs. Fitzroy intends coming to England?"

"You bet! I've cabled to her already; and just a word of warning, my pretty cousin—treat her a little more civilly than you have treated me, because her temper ain't any too easy."

Trouble was so new and strange to this hitherto petted child of fortune, that for a moment heart and courage failed her; but with a strength of will, for which few would have given her credit, she faced her cousin:

"We cannot remain here as your guests; I am sure it would be a most unhappy arrangement for all parties concerned. For myself I ask nothing, only I plead that you will not be hard with my father. He cannot live many years—he is an old man and broken down now with grief—at least leave him sufficient to supply his wants. I—I cannot bear that he should endure hardship."

"By Jove!" said Seth, admiringly, "you're a plucky girl, and I like pluck; if you'll only ask prettily, I'll do anything you wish. Give me a kiss to seal our bargain?" and he advanced his face towards her.

With a sudden rush of passion she lifted her hand and struck him smartly across the cheek, then fled like a wild thing towards the house.

### CHAPTER III.

SETH laughed; Aileen's outburst amused him infinitely. If she had been less distractingly pretty it might have been otherwise; but as he pulled the ends of his straw-coloured moustache, he said, musingly,—

"Well," he pronounced it "Wal," "I guess it would be good fun to break in that little vixen. Lord! how she would kick over the traces at first. But I reckon she'd have to give in at last, or I shouldn't be Seth Fitzroy. This isn't a bad place, though it is a bit quiet. My! won't mother be in her glory! And just to think how long I've been kept out of my own! It's enough to make a fellow ride roughshod over his own people."

But in the days which followed he honestly did his best—but oh! how poor that best was!—to set Aileen and her father at ease.

Mr. Fitzroy was utterly prostrated, and unable to leave his room, and Aileen spent almost every hour of the day with him.

She hated Seth that he had so broke in upon their seclusion and bothered her with his attentions.

She was wiser now than when first Justin entered her life, and she could not blind herself to the fact that her cousin's admiration was rapidly growing into a love as strong as it was sudden.

She shrank from his touch and his look with a sick loathing which frightened her. She tried her utmost to meet his advances of friendship with civility—for were they not his pensioners?—but she never could succeed in disguising her real feelings. Oh! would Justin never come? What a dreary month it was to wait! and would her new-born strength hold out until it was ended?

At the end of three weeks Mrs. Fitzroy arrived. She was a sharp-featured woman, yet with some remains of the prettiness which years ago had made Bamfylde Fitzroy for-geiful of her vulgarity.

"I am your 'Aunt Mandy,'" she said, as she pecked at the girl's cheek; "and I guess you ain't too pleased to know me; but there ain't no call for us to quarrel. You behave well to me, and I'll do the same by you; though, mind you, I don't mean you to be mistress here. You've got to remember the place is ours, and always has been, though you've kept it from us long enough."

The scarlet colour flamed into Aileen's face.

"We are unconscious usurpers, Mrs. Fitzroy. Not for worlds would my father have wronged any living creature. Oh, I would to Heaven he was not dependent upon your mercy and your bounty—the bread of charity is hard to eat."

Aunt Mandy looked at her curiously.

"I daresay it do fare hard to lose what never was yours; but Seth ain't one to be mean over things, so you needn't worry over that. Now, you'd better give up your keys to me. I ain't got any idea of letting servants do as they like."

Without a word Aileen complied, and then escaped to her father's room, her heart so full of bitterness and grief that she could with difficulty restrain her tears. Presently Seth joined his mother.

"See, here, old lady," he said, "I don't care a fig for the old chap; but I'm going to have him treated fair and square so long as Aileen will behave nicely to me. I'm going to marry her; that's what I'm going to do."

"If she'll have you," sneered his mother, "and you with your money might do better."

"Don't you believe it. English ladies ain't over and above fond of marrying ignorant chaps like me, even if they have got a pile of money; and I love the girl—there, that's the solemn truth. Then, there's another thing: these old families don't like us, they won't even look at me—they stick to the old boy. And you know the governor was never any great shakes—see, if I marry the girl they'll give us a footing here for her sake and her father's."

Mrs. Fitzroy looked thoughtful. She was a shrewd woman, and she saw the reason in her son's arguments. Yes, all things considered, it was better he should marry his cousin, so she said,—

"I ain't the one to cross your wishes, Seth. If the girl'll have you, I ain't got nothing to say against it."

But for all that she made Aileen's life a burthen almost too grievous to be borne. Daily she reminded her of her fortunate state in possessing such kindly and generous relatives, and by every petty means in her power made her understand her indebtedness.

It seemed to the girl she must die of her pain, and only the thought that Justin would soon return enabled her to endure "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune."

Mrs. Fitzroy had taken Spitfire into her own service. The girl made no remonstrance; but one day Seth found her in the stable caressing her favourite, and seeing the tears in her dark eyes, said,—

"I say, Aileen, why don't you ride your pony now?"

"My pony!" she echoed. "I have nothing now that I can call my own. I am scarcely likely to forget that so soon."

"Oh, rubbish! You've been listening to the old lady's nonsense, but you musn't mind it. Her bark is worse than her bite; and look here, Aileen, don't you go thinking I grade you anything, because I don't; and if you like you need never leave here, say the word, and I'll make you mistress of the place once again."

She tried to pass him by, but he caught and held her by the waist.

"You may as well hear me now as later on, because I mean to say what I've got to say—there's nothing like striking while the iron's hot—and," with a nervous laugh, "if you'll give me this little hand, all that's mine is thine."

"Let me go," she cried. "I cannot listen! I can never marry you—I do not love you! I—hate you!—oh, loose me!"

But he still retained his grasp of her, and his face had darkened ominously. "You'll sing to another tune soon," he said. "I know you don't think me good enough to look at, but you will have to get over your pretty pride, my dear, and to understand what sort of fellow I am. I'm ready to forgive all your nasty speeches, if you'll just say 'Seth, I'll marry you, but if not—'"

"If not?" she questioned breathlessly. "What then?"

"Only this; I'll make the old man refund every penny he has ever used of mine, and you may both starve, for all I care."

His passion was awful to see, and even her stout little heart quailed, although she answered sharply, "I think I understand what sort of fellow you are without troubling you for further explanation; and I will die before I yield to you, you coward."

He thrust her away roughly, and with a brutal laugh said, "I can wait; I will wait until you come to me on your knees entreating mercy; but I won't lose you. I love you all the more for your spirit, and I'll break you in yet, you little shrew;" and then, before she guessed his intention, he kissed her upon her pretty mouth.

Her strength failed her then; in her humiliation and anger she burst into a flood of tears. When she had recovered something like her ordinary composure Seth was gone, and only one thing was clear to her, she and her father could not remain longer at Brooklands. She went to him, her eyes all red with weeping, and her whole body tremulous with outraged pride.

"Daddy dear!" she said in a queer, uncertain voice, "are you very, very much afraid of poverty?"

"Why do you ask? Who has been vexing you? Is it that low-born American woman? She must understand that I will not suffer any insolence."

"Ah, dear! beggars cannot be choosers; and we are beggars."

"We are comparatively poor," he answered querulously, for sickness and trouble had sorely aged and changed him; "but we have enough and to spare for our wants, and there are many who would envy us. There, there child, bear up a little longer; when I have somewhat recovered we will leave here. I have been thinking of taking Rosemary Cottage—the rent is reasonable."

"My dear! oh, my dear, you don't understand; we shall be absolutely beggared; there will be nothing left for us to call our own!"

He sat erect amongst his pillows, fear in his eyes, a terrible fear in his heart. "Speak plainly," he said hoarsely, "I never was good at conundrums."

"Daddy! I don't know how to break it to you gently; but it is best I shall tell you. Seth Fitzroy intends claiming his back revenues; you know what that means for us."

Mr. Fitzroy was ghastly white, but he contrived to say—"I have his promise to the contrary."

"That promise he will break; but, darling, we shall not be friendless, and I shall find work to do!"

"To leave my home, my dear home!" he cried in an awful voice; "oh, that will kill me. Is there no alternative?"

"Yes; he has promised to be merciful to me if I will marry him."

"Then you must do it; he is not the husband I would have chosen for you—"

"Father!" she cried in dreadful accents, "this trouble has distracted you. You cannot wish this thing. I hate Seth, and there is somebody coming for me soon whom I love, and who for my sake will be good to you!"

"Can he restore my home and happiness to me? You have deceived me, and you must suffer for your deceit. You must marry Seth, I say it!"

"I cannot, I will not; even my love for you would recoil from such a sacrifice."

"Very well. I am an old man, death is not far off—go your ways, and remember that you helped to compass my death."

"No, no! You do not mean such bitter words; you do not know what you are saying now. And, dear, I would not tell you before about my lover, because I was not quite certain of my own heart; but he is your friend, your valued friend, Justin Branscombe."

But he repeated harshly, "You must marry Seth."

"Wait," she cried, in an agony of pain and fear. "What you ask is a hard thing, and I must have time for thought. Let me make a condition with you; if Mr. Branscombe does not return in the course of a fortnight I shall know it was all a mistake—our little dream—and then I will try to please you, although Heaven knows I would die rather than link my life to Seth's or accept a boon from his hands."

Her concession did not satisfy him, but she was steadfast to promise no more, believing, in her loving worship of Justin, that in some way he would contrive to help her and save her father's life.

She never reproached him with his selfishness, she never answered angrily when he "urged her sail" to marry the man she loathed and he despised; but bore with all his vagaries with a patience wonderful and pathetic to behold. But as the days went by she grew paler and sadder, and only the blessed hope of Justin's return supported her.

In silence she bore Aunt Amanda's bitter sneers and galling condescension, and fenced herself about with such dignity that even Seth was kept at bay. And then one morning she rose with bright eyes and steadfast face; Justin would be with her ere the close of the day! So she wore her prettiest gown, and her heart was lifted from its deep depression; she even sang as she went about, all unconscious or unheeding of Seth's frowning looks, for from her father he had learned the

cause of her unwanted happiness, and he hated his rival with the deadliest hate.

All through that long day he watched her; where she went he followed, skulking behind trees and bushes, keeping his watch with the hate growing more terrible in his dark heart. The morning wore by without bringing Justin, but Aileen was neither depressed nor doubtful; and still when the afternoon came she lingered in the gardens, nothing but a vague sense of disappointment in her heart that he tarried so long upon the way.

The short day closed in, but he did not come; and then indeed her courage began to fail, and she could ill endure Seth's open triumph or his mother's covert sneers.

"The man of your choice is a terrible laggard in love," the young fellow said maliciously; "if he neglects you now, what may you not expect in the future?"

She was too proud to reply, and went at an early hour to her own room. She could not understand what Justin's conduct meant; was it that he had been merely amusing a few idle hours by making her heart so wholly and irrevocably his, that she could not take it back again if she would? No, no, she would put that thought away as unworthy her, and a sin against him.

She would have patience; to-morrow he would come, and then what grief on earth could touch her, save the very natural one of leaving her own dear home? But the morrow brought no lover, nor many morrows; and though her heart was like lead in her breast she clung tenaciously to her hope, for hope dies hard with the young. But when a fortnight had gone by bringing neither Justin nor any tidings of him, she yielded herself wholly to despair, and in answer to her father's reiterated entreaties said,—

"What does it matter now what happens to me? Seth Fitzroy at least has the merit of loving me and loving me for myself along. Let it be as you and he wishes."

"Heaven bless you, dear. I am sure Seth will do his best to make your life a happy one; and it is very easy now to see why Branscombe has never returned. He has probably heard of the change in your fortune, and no doubt congratulates himself that you did not actually accept him."

Was that true? Oh! Heaven help her, was it true? But even if it were, what did it matter to her now, seeing she would marry Seth?

#### CHAPTER IV.

SETH joined Aileen by an open window. His face wore a look of triumph, and his pale eyes had taken light and colour to themselves. His usually harsh voice was almost tender as he said,—

"Aileen, your father has sent me to you." She never looked at him, she never turned her head; but an involuntary shiver passed over the little young figure.

"Well?" she questioned, coldly, and as she spoke she drew a little farther from him; but what did he care for that? He had won the game, and she being a girl of spirit naturally objected to defeat. So he answered, jocularly,—

"I am glad to hear it is well, my dear, and that you have made up your mind to marry me. 'For my soul, my girl, you couldn't do better. See what you gain by giving into my wishes, and I mean to do the right thing by you when we're married.'

The coarseness and vulgarity of his speech made her wince; never had she hated him so thoroughly as then; but she constrained herself to say, calmly,—

"I am grateful to you for your charity and condescension."

"Oh! hang that," Seth retorted, elegantly; "if you're only a good girl we'll forget the charity, though it isn't every fellow in my position would do that. As for condescension, well, though I might do better, still you're my

cousin, and I've enough for us all. Now let me look at your pretty face."

Slowly she turned her head, and it startled even Seth to see how white were the smooth, curved cheeks, how strange a fire slumbered in the great, dark, anguished eyes. But he was not easily abashed or repulsed, so he said, coolly,—

"And look here, my dear, we'll forget all about that other fellow who found you so amusing for a little while. You don't like the idea of being Mrs. Seth yet, but you'll soon grow used to it, and be one of the most affectionate little wives under the sun. Now give me kiss, or must I steal one?"

"Neither!" she said, in a voice which for all its low tone was sharp and angry. "I know that I must expect no mercy from you; that no entreaties of mine will move your hard heart to compassion, and so for my father's sake I consent to sacrifice myself; but until the sacrifice is complete I will go my own way, and refuse to allow you a lover's privileges. When I am your wife I must submit to your caresses and your blows alike, because I shall be your slave, purchased with your own money!"

"Don't go so far," Seth snarled, "your tongue may run away with your reason too often. I might take vengeance for every nasty word you have said to me, if I were inclined, and you couldn't help yourself. As you were pleased to say, you will be my slave; don't you make me remember that to your own cost!"

Her eyes gleamed like stars from beneath her level brows, and she laughed scornfully, perhaps to conceal the terror and pain in her heart. Then she half turned as though to leave him; but Seth's mood had changed again, and now he said, with clumsy treachery,—

"Don't let's quarrel, sweetheart, and at the start, too. I'll be as good as gold to you, if you'll only let me, and I won't so much as ask for a kiss until you're my wife, if you'll just treat me a bit civilly. When shall we be married?"

"When you please," she answered, recklessly; "when a thing has to be done, it is well to do it at once."

"By Jove, you're right, and after all I don't believe you hate me half as badly as you pretend. I ain't a bit afraid but you'll come at last to care for me as I do for you. Anyhow, I'm willing to run the risk. And we'll pull the affair off in a month from to-day. Eh? Can you be ready?"

"Yes, if it is your wish;" but in her heart she prayed, "Oh! may I die before that evil day comes."

Then "Aunt Mandy" was acquainted with the betrothal, and, having pecked her niece's cheek, proceeded to enlarge upon the advantage accruing to her from marriage with her son, and congratulated her upon her extreme luckiness. Aileen listened in chill silence, with proud face and close-set lips; and later when her engagement was announced, to the astonishment of the county, she received congratulations and half-veiled condolences alike with stoicism. Everybody was surprised, some not a little disgusted; but if Mr. Fitzroy did not object to receive his nephew for his son why should they? and, for Aileen's sake, doors that were closed to him began to open, and even "Aunt Mandy" was occasionally admitted to some lesser entertainment at some minor house; she was not satisfied, but still she did not complain, knowing that the thin edge of the wedge had been inserted, and all the rest would be very easy of accomplishment.

In horrible dread of the future, in ever painful remembrance of the past, Aileen lived through ten weary days, trying to school her rebellious heart to submission and patience.

It was towards the close of an early October day that she walked slowly and sadly through the grounds, to a place where the hedge was broken by a wicket gate. It was vain and foolish to dream of Justin now, but

the thought of him had drawn her hither; for here so often in that halcyon time she had not valued half highly enough whilst it was with her, they two—he and she—had loitered in the sweet dusk of the summer evenings. She leaned her elbows upon the topmost bar, and looked with sad unseeing eyes through the gathering gloom. Then suddenly she heard a step, a step she would have known amongst a thousand, although it was slower than it used to be. And she caught her breath, and trembled through all her young body—with joy that after all Justin was true, with agony because she was the promised wife of another. But she did not try to avoid a meeting, she so hungered to see him once again, and when a figure emerged from out of the chill grey mist she stretched out eager, pleading hands; in an instant he had caught and kissed them, and the voice she had hoped never again to hear was saying, "I have come at last, dear heart; I could not come before."

Not one word could she utter in reply, and he went on, "Are you angry with me for the delay? I have been ill, seriously ill at a remote Irish village, and I could not have written even if I would and you had not forbidden me to do so. But I knew you would not doubt me, because I judged your heart by my own; and as soon as they would let me leave my bed, I travelled night and day to reach you. What! not one word, Aileen?" and all the while he spoke his dark eyes rested on her pale loveliness with all a lover's fervour. "Are you angry still?"

With a sharp cry she wrested herself from his hold and stood erect. "Not angry, but the wretchedest girl under the sun. You should have come before or not at all; you do ill to seek me now," she wailed. "It is too late! too late!"

He opened the gate, and, joining her, took her wholly into his arms despite her faint resistance. "It is not too late for happiness, sweetheart, and my offence was not my fault. All the long journey through I have been saying to myself, 'I will go to her; she loves me—that is the secret my heart tells me—I shall soon call her mine.'"

"Oh, hush! hush! you don't know what you say; let me alone, one moment—only one moment—I want to think," and then she fell to sobbing as if her heart would break; but not one tear could she shed, and that made her grief all the more terrible to witness.

"I have startled you, my queen, my queen! I ought to have written, but I was too impatient to see you to wait longer; I wanted to hear you say, 'Justin, I love you,' and I never thought how strange my prolonged absence would appear. Aileen, cannot you say, with all your heart, you are glad to see me once again?"

"Ah! the white wild face she lifts to his.

"Glad! I never shall be glad any more; I may not speak again to you in such a fashion. I love you oh, dear Heaven! how I love you! No, no!" as he essayed to kiss her, "you have no longer any right to do that, and I may no more permit it."

"What do you mean?" he demanded, sudden fear in his voice.

"This," she answered, heavily, "that I am another's promised wife."

He loosed his hold of her, his white agonised face gleamed strangely through the gathering gloom; he said,

"You are playing with me;" and she answered,—

"Would to Heaven I were!"

"Do you mean that, loving me still—and you do love me—you have promised to marry another fellow?"

She bowed her head.

"I was mad, I thought you had forgotten me."

"You mean you judged me by your own heart," he answered, bitterly.

"You shall not leave me thinking so evilly of me. Oh, Justin! oh, Justin! why did you

not write? Why did you leave me to wreck your life and my own? Day after day I watched and waited for your coming. When you were gone I learned the secret of my own heart, because I so sorely missed you; and when a month had gone by, I said, every morning to myself, 'To-day I shall see him', but every night I went heavy-hearted to bed. And then they so pressed me; they so plainly showed me what they are pleased to call my duty, that I, being mad and reckless, foresaw my love."

"And who," he asked, harshly, "is my most fortunate rival?"

"Seth Fitzroy, my cousin."

"Seth Fitzroy! You told me once your father was your only relative."

"That was a mistake; you had but just gone when we discovered we had no right to our home;" and then briefly she told him Seth's story, and when her faltering voice had died out, he said, more harshly than before,—

"And so, because you loved and clung to the fleshpots of Egypt, because you feared poverty above and beyond all things, you were false to yourself and to me."

"No, no! never that! What I have done has been for my father's sake; it would kill him to leave his home, and to suffer want—he is so old and so feeble now—for his sake you will forgive me?" Oh, if I had but been more patient! Now I am bound fast by my promise, and I dare not go from it; but how can I bear to think of all that I have lost, of all that you will suffer because of me?"

"You will forget, seeing that you will have your heart's dearest desire—riches and position; but I shall remember you all my life, and curse the beauty which lured me on to misery."

"No! for Heaven's sake no!" she panted, "let me have for my consolation the knowledge that now and then you will think of me, and that kindly—not any more with love and regret, only as a woman you once held dear, and who, despite her sin against you, was loyal in her love. Good-bye! good-bye! I hope we may never meet again; but now speak kindly to me once before you go?"

She had drawn near to him, and, with her slender hands upon his breast, looked pitifully into his haggard miserable face.

He had been harsh to her, he had spoken bitter and unjust words, but she was ready, woman-like, to forgive all this, and, under the tremulous touch of her hands, the mute appeal in her most lovely eyes, the scorn and anger died out of his own—a strong shudder passed over him, and suddenly he clasped her in his arms.

"Aileen, Aileen! you are mine; I cannot let you go. I don't care how you have sinned against me, you are young and easily led; the temptation was too strong for you. There was only love on one side, on the other there was wealth; but I will not let you lose your sweet identity; you shall not send me comforlless away. It is I only who have your heart, and I only who can make your happiness. Come to me, little darling, I have enough and to spare, and so long as he lives Mr. Fitzroy shall be to me as my own father. Let all else go but our love—sweet and dear, will not that suffice us?"

"I am so weak," she wailed, "and you so strong; do not tempt me to break my given word, least, doing so, I break my father's heart. Help me to do my duty. Heaven knows it is hard enough; in pity for my pain do not make it harder."

She lay in his arms, supine, inert, like a lily bruised and broken by the storm, and the long dark lashes drooping veiled the anguish of her lovely eyes.

Justin, stooping, kissed her wildly again and again. "Thus and thus I seal you mine—mine through life to death. Aileen, how can you escape so great a love as this?"

With an exceeding bitter cry she wrenched herself from him.

"I am stronger alone. Ah! do not touch me have mercy and let me go. Do not let

me have it on my conscience that I broke faith with my father; he relies upon me to help him, he looks to die in the house of his forebears. You are made of sterner stuff than he, and you are young. You will rise superior to this trial; you will forget, and in time forgive. Oh, my dear! oh, my dear! I wish you good-bye and go!"

With fast streaming tears she turned aside, but he who had never been humble before was humble now, and entreated.

"Think again. Aileen, must two lives be wholly spoiled for the sake of one that is nearly spent?"

"As a man of honour I entreat you to say no more."

"If you put it so, there is nothing left me but to obey; but this one thing I will say, if you had loved me half as well as you love this world's goods you never would have failed me. I wish I had never seen you, for you have spoiled the whole world for me;" and so, with man's injuries, he turned upon his heel, wilfully believing her false, and as wilfully deaf to her wild cry, "Come back! oh, come back! I do not leave me in anger and distrust!"

And when he neither heeded her cry nor returned to her, she ran like a wild thing through the coppice, stumbling often, because the cruel briars caught at her dress, and would have held her prisoner only she tore them away with little soft hands, heedless of the wounds inflicted; her brain was in a whirl, and her heart seemed like to burst. He had misjudged her; her sacrifice was as nothing to him, he believed it brought her all she coveted—she who never had cared for riches save for the good they gave her power to do. She tossed out her arms wildly, moaning, "Cruel! oh, cruel!" and sank in a huddled heap upon the green sward. And there Seth found her, and, with a gentleness of which few would believe him capable, carried her into the house.

## CHAPTER V.

"Poor little hands," said Seth, as he sat by Aileen's couch the following morning, "how came they so scratched and torn?"

The girl turned wearily upon her pillows, and the blood flushed into her hitherto pallid face. She either would not, or could not look into his eyes; and though she did her best not to shrink from the touch of his horny palm upon her delicate fingers, she succeeded badly. But Seth was too moved by pity to notice this, as he asked,

"Are they very painful? Is there nothing I can do for them?"

And his mother broke in irritably,—

"For goodness sake, Seth, don't make such a gowd of yourself. If Aileen hadn't been where she shouldn't have been, happen she'd have had no scratched fingers to cry over, and no troublesome fainting fit."

"Aunt Amanda is always so sensible and kind," Aileen said, with a miserable attempt at sarcasm. "Why don't you emulate her example?"

Mrs. Fitzroy at once broke into invective, but her son speedily suppressed her, for even the good lady was afraid of his outbursts of passion; and now she prudently withdrew, leaving the betrothed couple together.

"Now she's gone," said Seth, "you may as well tell me what took you out last night? I think I've got a right to know that."

"Yes," answered the girl, wearily, "I am not in a position to deny that. I suppose it is my duty to tell you what occurred. If I am to be your wife, I cannot learn submission too soon; and if you are angry, at least you never can say I have deceived you."

"You've been too confoundedly honest for that; but I promise to listen quietly; and look here, my girl, more than this, I'll never fling what you've said or done in your teeth."

"Thank you. Seth, you know I have never pretended to care for you?"

"You tell me daily in looks, if not in words, you hate me."

"I am afraid I do, although I am going to try to mend my ways. Last night I was so heavy-hearted that I stole out, going through the coppice to the little gate overlooking the Church-road, and—and there I saw him. He had been ill, and could not come before to claim my half promise. If you swear, I will not say another word—remember you are in England."

"Wal," in his excitement his thin veneer of polish always wore off. "Wal, go ahead! I suppose he wanted you to give me the slip—I mean to jilt me. That's about the size of it, I reckon."

"At first he did," Aileen answered, wearily, "but when I told him I must marry you, he almost cursed me; and now he wouldn't make me his wife even if I were free, because he believes I am willingly selling myself for the sake of land and gold. You know that is not true."

"Well, you needn't make it so plain if it ain't. It don't gain by repetition. Go on with your tale, I want to know how we stand."

"As we did before, unless you are generous and release me—not that I may marry him, for indeed I have no hope of that, only that I may live in peace."

"And your father die in a workhouse? That's what I call filial affection."

But, Aileen, half beside herself with grief, and her longing to be free, went on without heeding him,—

"I never, never can care for anyone half so much as Justin. I shall never make you a good or kind wife, and so for your sake as well as for mine, I beg you to give me back the promise I never should have made. I tell you frankly that I was mad with grief when he left me, and I don't remember receiving one single scratch as I ran homewards. I ran until I dropped, and never knew any more until I woke to consciousness and found you by my side."

"And that's where I mean always to be, and I don't care a hang for the fellow who treated you so badly; and I'll never remind you that you loved a man who jilted you."

How Aileen shuddered. How could she go through life with this man so dead to all delicacy and feeling?

"I haven't any doubt about our future happiness, and when once you are my wife I don't intend my mother to be mistress of the place. Treat her kindly, Aileen, and you won't have much cause for complaint. She's got her faults, but she aint without her virtues. And look here, if there's anything I can do to please you, say the word only and it shall be done."

He was so evidently in earnest that in spite of herself she was touched. She felt so lonely and wretched that she was even grateful to him for the affection he gave her; and so with a wan smile she gave him her hand.

"You are very kind," she said; "but I am already too much your debtor to ask for any boon. I will try to do my duty towards you, and if I fail, you must show me that consideration you are showing now; because until lately I have always been the spoiled child of fortune."

"Well, spoiling seemed to suit you, and I ain't inclined to try any other treatment," Seth said, with a laugh. "Oh, don't you have any fear, sweethearts. We'll be as jolly as sandboys when once we're married."

It was such speeches as this which jarred upon the girl. Seth was so innately vulgar. Not all the veneering in the world could cover up his deficiencies.

He had inherited all the characteristics of his low-born American relatives. Neither in disposition nor features had he any resemblance to the Fitzroys, and, to make matters worse, he had an overweening sense of his own talents, his own importance.

Still, he meant well, and Aileen tried honestly to blind herself to his imperfections, but she dreaded what she might become

through years of close companionship with Seth; and one verse written by the Laureate haunted her with cruel persistency,—

"As the husband is, the wife is: thou art mated with a clown,  
And the grossness of his nature will have weight to drag thee down."

She shrank in horror from the thought. Could she, Aileen Fitzroy, sink to the level of "Aunt Mandy"? and then she would pray to die; but she was young and strong, and "Death shuns the wretch who fain the blow would meet," and so she lived on.

From her father she derived no comfort; trouble had sorely changed him, he was querulous now and difficult to please. Short of state, he had lost his dignity, and with his dignity that gentle consideration for others which once had been part and parcel of his nature.

Then, too, his sister-in-law had a way of irritating him, so that one day he said to Aileen,—

"When you are married, my dear, you must prevail upon Seth to send that dreadful woman away, I cannot endure to live with her."

"But, father, she is Seth's mother. It would be terrible if he refused to share his home with her. I will not ask such a wicked thing of him, although I am free to confess I dislike and despise her."

"But she is not a lady."

"Neither is Seth a gentleman," answered Aileen; "but he loves his mother, and she idolizes him. Remembering all we owe him, we cannot ask this thing of him if we would."

"Then I am to be condemned to companionship with that woman all my life?" he demanded querulously. "It is monstrous. I must say, Aileen, you have none of the Fitzroy spirit."

To this she made no reply, knowing how useless it would be; and then, because she was grateful to Seth for his new-born consideration, she tried her utmost to please him, and even won words of praise from Aunt Mandy. Of Justin she dared not think, save in the solitude of her chamber, where she wept bitter tears as she breathed out his name in prayers and blessings; and of him she heard no least news. To please his mother Seth had postponed his marriage until New Year's Day.

"It is the lookiest in all the year," she had said, "and it'll give Aily time to learn your son boy," and Aileen was extravagantly grateful to her for her suggestion.

So the time went on and the preparations for the wedding were well in hand. Christmas came—a real old-fashioned Christmas, with ice and snow, with keen winds that pierced one through—and Aileen, remembering how short was the time of her freedom, grew paler and thinner, and the smile with which she greeted Seth was but the ghost of her former one.

"He is very good to me," she said again to herself, "I will do my duty towards him; but oh! may Heaven make the time of my suffering short."

Christmas Day was kept by the Fitzroys in the good old style, for Seth was determined to be "English all through," as he expressed it; and although his *gauché* manner, coarse speech, and boastful bearing were almost worse than death to the sensitive bride-elect, she would not permit one of the guests to guess so much. If the sacrifice was to be made, she would make it without a moan; should the poor Hindoo woman burning with her dead husband put the English lady to shame? But she went to her room that night with aching head and burning cheeks. She had overheard one she had thought her real friend say to another, —

"And so Aileen will marry that barbarian after all; I certainly credit her with better taste. I cannot imagine how she endures his vulgarity."

"Oh, money, like charity, covers a multitude of sins," retorted the other with a scornful laugh, "and Aileen Fitzroy is no fonder of poverty than you and I, although she did affect to despise riches."

The words burnt into her heart and brain; she could not forget them, and it hurt her most cruelly to think that those she had known and loved best were the first to misjudge her.

"Oh, how fast the days went by! It was the twenty-ninth of December, she had but two days of freedom left her, and her heart grew sick at the thought. She had grown weak and ill too, so that it was with difficulty she kept about. In his own way Seth was very good to her, and, thanks to his authority, Mrs. Fitzroy did not venture to remark upon her niece's pallor and abstraction, or to reproach her because of them.

On the morning of the twenty-ninth Seth came to her, skates in hand—skating was the one pastime in which he excelled.

"You won't mind, Aileen," he said, deferentially, "you won't mind much if I don't get back until six? There's some jolly good spots at Karsholt, and some of the fellows have invited me to join them. You won't miss me very much?"

There was something so wistful in his tones, something almost pathetic in his pale eyes; and Aileen, who was most keenly alive to kindness, especially now when kindness was so rare, voluntarily extended her hand to him.

"Yes, I shall miss you," she said, very gently, "you are so good to me; but I am glad to think you will have a nice day."

Light came into the pale eyes, colour into the usually colourless face, and he drew his breath sharply like one made dumb by excess of joy; and then he lifted her little hands and kissed them with a reverence which touched her almost to tears.

"Aileen," he said, "I'm a queer sort of chap, but at least I'm honest in my love for you; I would do anything for you but give you up—and I'd die rather than do that, I ain't all bad, and you can make me better. You said once I was never to kiss you until you were my wife and my slave—do you remember? 'Tis I that am your slave, and I humbly ask you now to let me kiss you upon the cheek—it ain't much to ask, seeing you are soon to be my wife."

She was just a trifle paler as she turned her dainty cheek to meet his caress.

"It is your right," she said gently, "and you have been very forbearing. Good-bye, Seth, and I wish you a very pleasant time."

Seth Fitzroy went away in the happiest frame of mind; to him it was perfectly clear that Aileen's love would eventually be his, and that thought gave a certain pride to his bearing wholly foreign to it before.

He met many he knew upon the ice, and it was remarked afterwards that he had never shown to such an advantage as on this particular day. The exercise brought colour into his face, and his eyes shone with a new light; then, too, he had quite dropped his boastful manner, and one pretty girl was heard to say, "Aileen Fitzroy is working wonders with her fiance; he will end by becoming a very presentable creature after all. I always said Aileen was a genius."

The short day wore to its close; the skaters, tired with prolonged exertions were preparing to return to their several homes; Seth was still careering wildly round. Fine snow had begun to fall, and the air had lost its crispness; the sky was copper-coloured in the west, and overhead were leaden clouds which foretold a storm.

"Better leave it now," said one young fellow to Seth; "and it will be dark soon, and it is poor fun skating by oneself."

Seth laughed.

"Oh, I'm not due at the Manor until six; and as I guess we shan't get any sport tomorrow, I'm making the most of it to-day."

"Well, I'm off," retorted the other, as he

began to unbuckle his straps. "Jove! Fitzroy, I wish I were as much at home on the ice as you. Hi! look out, the ice is infernally thin just there!"

But he spok too late. There was the sound of crashing ice, a sudden sharp cry, and those who remained on the shore saw a figure struggling in the water, with wild hands clutching the treacherous ice, which broke at every grasp of the strong fingers. Some ran for ropes, others stretched out their helping hands; but alas! alas! the ropes were long in coming, the friendly arms fell short of the sinking man, and so he disappeared from view. Once, twice, a third time he rose, and from his failing lips there broke one word, "Aileen!" then he sank, and was seen no more, until the ice being broken all around, a villager recovered his body.

The day was over, night was falling, and for Seth Fitzroy there remained nothing but unbroken night, and the last dark resting-place to which all must travel.

At the Manor, Mrs. Fitzroy was loudly bewailing her son's neglect and the delay of dinner, whilst Mr. Fitzroy was querulously demanding if "the whole machinery of the house must be put out of order simply and solely to gratify Seth's caprices?"

Suddendy Aileen started erect upon her couch; her quick ear had caught the slow and heavy tramp of many feet.

"What is that?" she asked, with a vague sense of fear at her heart.

"On!" said "Aunt Mandy," peevishly, "what should it be but Seth a bringing along some of them fellows he's so fond of now?"

Her language had not improved with her improved condition.

"But they come so slowly," the girl answered, her fear taking definite form as the steps, so slow and solemn, drew nearer; and rising, she went hurriedly into the hall. A servant, pale and scared-looking, met her there.

"Go back, Miss Aileen," he said, hurriedly, "go back, please," but she resolutely pressed forward. She must know the worst.

Then she saw four men who carried something on a rough litter; that something was covered, but little streams of water fell from it across the marble floor, and without a word she knew that "it" was Seth and that he had met his death by drowning.

She fell against the wall, and those who watched her thought that she must faint. She had never loved him, there had been times when she hated him; but she forgot that now in the shock of his untimely death. Poor Seth! Poor Seth! Who would tell his mother?"

One loud frantic scream roused her from her partial trance; and then she saw a wild-faced woman fling herself down by the poor dead body, heard her cry piteously upon her son to speak just once to his "wretched mother;" and then she forgot all this woman had made her suffer, and taking her in her arms would have led her away, but that she resisted.

Then ensued such a terrible scene that never after could Aileen think of it without a shudder; but, finally, Mrs. Fitzroy was persuaded to go to her own room.

And Seth lay in the death-chamber of his ancestors, pale and still, with a majesty upon his face that life could never have bestowed.

Aileen gave no thought to her new found freedom. It had come to her in such a terrible way that she could not rejoice in it, and deep in her heart was the unspoken thought, "I wish I had been kinder to him whilst he lived."

The day of the funeral came—gray and cold, with patches of melting snow by the roadway and in the dreary churchyard.

The mourners for Seth were few—just his mother and Mr. Fitzroy—Aileen being in far too delicate a state to venture out. "Aunt Mandy" wept bitterly, and even Mr. Fitzroy felt a little compunction at his own want of sorrow and sympathy.

Perhaps it was natural that he secretly rejoiced to find himself once again sole and undisputed owner of the estates he had so long believed his own. They were strictly entailed, and at Seth's death reverted to him. On his decease they became Aileen's.

Bamfylde Fitzroy's widow, of course, had never had any settlements, and by this great calamity she was left totally unprovided for; but her brother-in law was not ungenerous, rather the reverse, for he made her a handsome allowance; and she, hankering after the old free life and congenial companionship, returned at once to America, from whence she occasionally communicated with Mr. Fitzroy. To Aileen she never wrote, because, as she expressed it,—

"It fairly riled her to think that bit of a girl would have all that should have been Seth's."

And with the return of his fortune Mr. Fitzroy's old placid disposition woke to life again.

## CHAPTER VI.

The Manor was closed, and Mr. Fitzroy had gone abroad with his daughter. It was a grievance to him that she had lost her bright and pretty ways.

Why, with the return of prosperity, he had resumed his old manners, his old cheerful bearing, and he was an old man.

It was unnatural that so young a girl as Aileen should not at least follow suit. But she had grown grave beyond her years—the light had gone from her sweet eyes, and the smiles, now so infrequent, had always an element of sadness in them—her laughter he never heard.

She had never loved Seth, so her grief could not be for him. Was she still thinking of and longing for Justin Branscombe?

Wishing her happiness above and beyond all, remembering how she had been ready to sacrifice herself for his sake, the old man said one day,—

"My dear, would it not be well to acquaint Branscombe with all the facts of the case—of your cousin's death, and your consequent freedom?"

The colour leapt into her face, only to die away, leaving it ghostly white. She essayed to laugh, but the attempt did not even deceive him, and he was not keen of discernment.

"Where is the use?" she asked with sharpened voice. "Mr. Branscombe would but believe ill of me; he thinks I sold myself for wealth and position. What does it matter? It all goes into the day's march, and everything will be the same a hundred years hence. Oh, I am well enough, daddy; and together you and I will be very happy yet."

So she dismissed the subject, and throughout that year of travel it was not again referred to. Aileen saw many and wonderful places, a broader life was opened to her, but always deep in her heart was that awful longing, not to be appeased, that insatiable desire for the sight of Justin's face and the touch of his hand. Other suitors she had, but they could not move her from her loyalty, they could not shake her love. What he had been to her in the beginning he must be to the end, and she looked forward, with some heart sickness, to the dreary time when in the course of nature her father must leave her alone, and in all the world there should be none to speak a comforting word to her. She was so young to be so unhappy—so young to feel that all her story was told, that life held nothing for her that was good.

In May they returned to Brooklands, but Aileen's health appeared so failing that Mr. Fitzroy determined to take her away once more. It was wonderful what vitality he possessed, how much the improvement of his fortunes had improved his bodily and mental health.

They visited all places of note on the south

and south-west coast of England. Aileen saying that "one could not know enough of one's own country;" and then they went to Wales. There, amidst the hills and green valleys, such rest and peace came to the girl, that long, long years afterwards she used to say that spell of quiet saved her from madness. They went to Tintern, taking up quarters at "The George"; and there one day at the Abbey Aileen met her lover.

It was a favourite spot with her, this grand historic ruin, and she liked best to linger there in the early morning before the tourists were abroad. She had just left the tower, her hands filled with wild flowers, which she had found growing upon the walls, and stood a moment to enjoy the beauty of the scene, when her eyes met and were held by the gaze of one she had never hoped to see again.

White as the marguerites she held went her exquisit face.

"Justin!" she said under her breath, "oh, Justin!"

He was quite composed, and regarded her with the coldness of a casual acquaintance, wilfully blinding himself to the love and anguish in her eyes.

"This is a most unexpected meeting," he said. "I hope that you are well—and happy."

She looked at him like one fascinated, and her poor pale lips tried vainly to make some response; her eyes filled with unaccustomed tears, and her whole lithe young body was shaken by her emotion.

But he remained unmoved; and said with a faint cold smile, "I suppose, like myself, you are on holiday-making intent."

She lifted her piteous eyes to his, holding out flower-laden hands in entreaty for kindness.

"Speak friendly to me," she whispered, "do not be so hard!"

But he withdrew his hand from beneath the gentle touch, and said, quite calmly, "Friendship between us is impossible; I do not even wish it now!"

She shrank back as though he had dealt her a blow.

"Not friends?" she questioned; "why should we be enemies, you and I? I cannot quarrel with you if I would."

Some slight sign of feeling crossed his stern face, and his voice was almost tender as he said,—

"Oh, no; we will not quarrel."

Hope sprung up in her heart; little shafts of light broke through the misery in her eyes; little dimples showed in the curves of the soft cheeks, and the line of her lips unbent.

"Then you did not mean to put me out of your life altogether—you did not mean you refused my friendship?"

"You are jumping at conclusions," he answered, wearily. "I intended to convey to you that we stand on neutral ground—we are neither friends nor foes. As for disagreeing, there is small chance for that, we are not likely to meet again; with all my heart I hope we never shall."

Her arms fell slackly by her sides; her eyes stared blankly at him; a little sob lifted her breast; then she said,—

"If it is for your happiness that I should pass out of your life as I have passed out of your love, I shall not complain. I hope you will forget how I have to-day humbled myself before you. I—I deserved to be rebuked for forgetting my woman's pride and dignity—but—but you might have shown me some little kindness for the sake of the old days."

She had let her flowers fall in a fading heap at her feet, and her small hands were restlessly clasping and unclasping; the misery in her eyes might well melt a harder heart than his. But he would not heed it; and, believing that she was already married to Seth, he wondered at her audacity in addressing him in such a fashion.

"I hope you will forget me," she said, very humbly, "and that your life will be as happy as mine must be wretched, and may you never know how cruel it is to be left wholly

destitute of hope. And now, good-bye—for give me that I brought sorrow into your life—forgive me and forget me."

She did not tender her hand in farewell—perhaps she felt he would not touch the slender fingers he once had kissed—but slowly and sadly she turned away, and entered what once had been the refectory. When she ventured to glance round, Justin was gone; and, with a heavy heart, she returned to their hotel.

Her father met her cheerily, heedless of the pallor of her face; and, as she was always quiet now, her silent manner conveyed no hint of added sorrow to his mind.

"My dear," he said, "I have been planning a very pleasant excursion; we will take the coach to Chepstow and visit the castle; I understand it is well worth the journey."

"Very well," said Aileen; and she went away to make some necessary changes in her toilet.

She cared nothing at all about the projected trip; her heart was too heavy for her to find pleasure in anything. But she gave no sign of this; in those days she seemed to submit her will, even her wishes, to her father's—he was now the only one who loved her, she thought with a great throb of bitterness.

But when she had taken her seat on the top of the coach, and saw the grand green hills rising on either side, all clad in their loveliest garb, the smiling valleys so far below, and when she felt the fresh air blowing upon her face, a sense of exhilaration filled her whole being. After all, life was worth living, and the world was fair. The birds were making maddest melody, down the hill-side; little rivulets leapt and shone in the sunlight, and the scent of myriads of flowers was wafted towards her.

They had passed the Wyndcliff in all its majesty, and now they bowled along the narrow, ever ascending road to the accompaniment of a horn, and the cheerful laughter of their companions.

So at last they came to Chepstow Castle, here the coach drew up to allow such passengers as chose to alight; and after clambering over a very high stile, and walking along a stony and remarkably circuitous path, Mr. Fitzroy and Aileen arrived at the Castle.

There it stood, a fine old ruin, telling mournfully of bygone grandeur, and in fancy Aileen already began to people it with brave men and beautiful women long, long ago departed.

The old and battered door, studded with nails, was guarded by a splendid retriever, which regarded them curiously whilst they waited an answer to their summons.

At length the custodian's wife appeared, a stout, comely woman, who, keys in hand, conducted them at once to the most noticeable portions of the ruins; then considering she had done all that was required of her, she returned to the rooms—the only habitable ones—which she occupied with her family.

From inspecting the dungeons, which resembled bear-pits, and treading cautiously over the broken floors of the long deserted rooms, Mr. Fitzroy led the way by the moat, and thence to the chapel, which is built on still higher ground.

The grass had grown up between the stones of the floor, the roof was entirely gone, and the blue sky hung over them like a canopy. One tower yet remained, and Mr. Fitzroy, who really seemed to have renewed his youth, began the difficult work of climbing the broken steps, followed slowly by his daughter.

The view from the top of the tower was well worth the trouble they had taken in ascending; but the downward journey, which had to be performed backwards, was perilous in the extreme.

Whether she turned giddy, or whether she slipped inadvertently, Aileen was not quite sure, but suddenly she slipped, and with a sharp cry fell down the remaining steps with her right ankle twisted in her skirt.

Her cry brought a tourist to her rescue; he

had entered the chapel just in time to see her father bending over her, and hear him say entreatingly,—

"Aileen, my dear, what is it? pray—pray, try to tell me! Oh dear, you have fainted! what shall I do?"

He advanced rapidly.

"Mr. Fitzroy, I am at your service."

The old man looked up with an expression of relief.

"Branscombe! oh, what Providence sent you here? Just look at my poor child, and tell me what I ought to do. I am afraid she has hurt herself very badly."

"Well," said Justin, quietly, "you had better hunt up the woman who keeps the place, and send her here with water, and brandy if it is obtainable, then get some sort of conveyance and remove her to a comfortable spot."

He had stooped whilst speaking, and gently disengaged her foot from her skirt, felt the ankle carefully. He had some slight knowledge of surgery, and he wore a concerned look as he lifted his glance to her father's.

"You must get lodgings here, she will never bear the return journey. The ankle is dislocated, and I am afraid she will suffer much pain from it. Bring back a doctor with you."

Then he was left alone with this girl whom he had loved so well; and as in his haste and fear Mr. Fitzroy forgot to ask the woman's aid, and no other tourists were near, he had ample time to feast his eyes upon the face he had hoped and prayed never again to see.

He gently lifted the lithe young form until the beautiful brown head lay on his breast, and an insane desire possessed him to kiss the sweet mouth and the pale, cold cheeks. Oh! had she but been true, how much happier his lot!

Then his eyes travelled downwards to her hands (she had drawn off her gloves), and they lay before him in all their white beauty. His heart leapt up within him when he saw that the left hand was utterly ringless. She was not married yet! Well, what of that? Did it concern him ever so little? Her wedding was doubtless only postponed. She would marry her cousin and his wealth!

(Continued on page 500.)

## HILDRED ELSINORE.

### CHAPTER XVII.

GUY BERTRAM was as good as his word. When the Rector of Little Netherton, not without fears and hesitation, presented the list of his liabilities, the benevolent millionaire produced his cheque-book, and wrote a draft for the full amount; and to a rich man no doubt the sum seemed a very trifling one so to have wrecked the peace of a family. Mrs. Elsinore's maxim had always been, "Pay for a thing when you have it, or—go without it;" so except the big debt to the money-lender at Chilton, and a long outstanding account at the doctor's, for which the kind old surgeon would never have pressed, there was very little owing. A hundred and seventeen pounds cleared everything, and Guy Bertram, as he handed a cheque for the exact amount to the much-harassed Rector, said, cheerfully,—

"Really, Mr. Elsinore, I don't think you need have worried so."

The older man smiled half sadly.

"It is given by only a stroke of your pen," he said, simply, "but for me it meant an impossible sum. I assure you, Mr. Bertram, I have thought over those debts until their amount seemed stamped on my brain in letters of fire. Thanks to you we are clear now, and my sufferings will be a warning to me. For the future we will starve rather than run in debt."

He was a grateful, unassuming man. It

never occurred to him that Bertram's wealth should by rights have been Hildred's, and that if the millionaire had given him five hundred pounds it would only have been restitution. He never thought Mr. Bertram might at least have allowed a few pounds margin, seeing their poverty-stricken state, and he did not even remind him of the promised allowance to Hildred. He took the cheque with warm thanks, but asked for nothing more.

They were in the study. Quite a large fire burnt in the grate in Bertram's honour. He sat close to it, warming his hands at its cheerful glow. It was one of Guy's characteristics that he always felt cold.

Mr. Elsinore, seated opposite, wondered what he ought to do next. Welcome as their benefactor would be to his wife, the Rector had an innate feeling he was not the sort of man to dine off cold mutton and rice pudding. It was almost one o'clock, and the guest made no attempt at leaving. Mr. Elsinore had almost resolved to ask him to share their meal. The guest could call it "lunch," and dine royally later at his hotel, when suddenly Guy Bertram broke the silence with a question so unexpected as almost to take his listener's breath away.

"Mr. Elsinore, do you believe in second love?"

The middle-aged Rector coloured to the roots of his thin hair. He did not know what to answer. In his secret heart he cherished the romantic doctrine that a man can love but once; but, since he had married again within a year of his Lucy's death, to confess such an opinion was not precisely courteous or loyal to his present wife.

He hesitated.

"It depends upon the man," he said, slowly, "and upon how the first love ended. To be faithful to anyone who had deceived us would be folly."

Guy Bertram looked straight into the other's face.

"After all, I am not an old man," he said, gravely. "I am well under forty still, and though not strong, I may live another twenty years. Mr. Elsinore, will you give me your daughter, Hildred, or must the fact that ten years ago—while she was a little child—I was engaged to another woman stand between us?"

"Good gracious!"

It was hardly the authorized way of receiving a proposal for his daughter; but the Rector really could not help it, the words seemed literally wrung from him in his surprise. This man only yesterday had expressed the strongest possible aversion to matrimony, had implied his heart was buried in Blanche Tempest's grave, and now he was actually wishing to wed a girl whom he had only seen once in his life.

He was not in the least offended at the Rector's ejaculation; Guy Bertram was very slow to take offence; he smiled, and began to explain.

"I don't wonder you are surprised. It must seem to you such a flat contradiction to what I said yesterday, but, you see, then—I had not seen Hildred."

"No."

The Rector, for the life of him, could not give a more expansive answer. He still felt as though he must be in a dream.

"She is the image of her aunt," went on Guy Bertram. "Looking at her, I could fancy the girl I loved so dearly and was parted from so cruelly, ten years ago, had come back to life. You told me, yesterday, your daughter was free; only give me your consent to try and win her, Mr. Elsinore, and you will make me a happier man than all Lady Tempest's million has been able to do."

"Don't you think—" the Rector had recovered his self-command now—"don't you think, Mr. Bertram, you are carried away by the child's resemblance to your first love? You can know nothing of Hildred, and on closer acquaintance you might change your mind."

"You said she was free," objected Guy.

"She is perfectly free; the only man who ever proposed to her was one of the farmers here. They had been boy and girl together, and I think myself he mistook the old friendly affection for love; anyway, he has gone to Australia, and the matter is ended."

"If she is free," persisted Bertram, "surely you will give me a chance. I am nearly twenty years her senior, and I was once in love with her aunt. Are these such fatal barriers between us that you will not let me plead my cause?"

"Neither could be a real objection," said the Rector, gravely; "indeed, Mr. Bertram, I was not raising difficulties on *our* side, but I can't forget Hildred is only a little country girl, and from the position you wife must occupy you ought to marry a fashionable young lady."

"I shall marry Hildred—or no one," was the firm reply. "I will settle twenty thousand pounds on her, and allow her five hundred a year pin money. She shall have her own way in everything if only she will be my wife."

"But," objected poor Mr. Elsinore, "you can't be sure of your own mind; wait, at least, until you have seen more of her. To propose to her now would only frighten the child, for I assure you, Mr. Bertram, Hildred is not mercenary; all that you can give her will not influence her decision."

A tap at the door, twice repeated, had been disregarded, and now, Mrs. Elsinore, anxious that her mashed potatoes—the one hot item of the dinner—should not be utterly spoilt, ventured to come in with rather a deprecating air to ask her husband if he had not heard the dinner-bell, and to beg Mr. Bertram to take a little refreshment after his long drive.

The look of the two faces troubled her. Her husband's was perplexed, almost bewildered, but Mr. Bertram's expression was one of intense anxiety.

He caught at her arrival as giving him an ally.

"Women are always kinder-hearted than men," he said to the Rector, half sadly, then to the lady. "Madam, will you use your influence with Mr. Elsinore in my favour. I want him to consent to my proposing to his daughter Hildred, and he persists in saying that I cannot be sure of my own mind on so short an acquaintance."

There was a gleam in Mrs. Elsinore's small eyes which told plainly which side she would take. Could Mr. Bertram possibly have guessed this woman would have done anything in the world for money, and would have sacrificed her step-daughter a dozen times over for the advancement of her own brood?

"You are too generous," she said, gravely. "Charles, remember Hildred's love of music and beautiful things; recollect how she hates our sordid life, and the humdrum round of domestic duties. If ever there were a girl fitted by nature to be a rich man's wife, and to bear such honours gracefully, it is Hildred."

The Rector made a protest.

"She is very young," he said, simply; "little more than a child."

"She is old enough to win hearts," said his wife, practically. "Only this spring, Mr. Bertram, a very promising young farmer wanted her; but the child is romantic. She wanted someone who could understand music and poetry, not a husband whose thoughts all ran on butter-making and pig-keeping."

"I am very fond of music, and I know nothing about farming," said Bertram, cheerfully, "so I may have better luck than the farmer. I have not a single relation in the world," he added, kindly, "so if Hildred will only marry me, I shall have to adopt her sisters as my own. There never was such a lonely, desolate fellow as I am."

He followed Mrs. Elsinore in to dinner, and sat next Hildred. He said nothing of his wishes of course then, but he seemed to anticipate her every need. He waited on her with a kind of grave tenderness which, Mrs.

Elsinore told her husband afterwards, was "beautiful."

"I am going to stay a long while at Chilton," he said to Hildred when he left the Rectory, "and I hope we shall become friends. Mr. Elsinore tells me you are musical. If I bring some duets over to-morrow, will you try them with me?"

For a whole week Guy Bertram kept silence; every day found him at Little Netherton early, and he seldom left before the evening.

Everyone in the house, except the two youngest children, knew why he came; only Hildred was unconscious of it. She thought him very clever and agreeable, but she had never lost the strange feeling of fear with which she had regarded him at first.

And then one afternoon he spoke. The Rector was out, Martha and her next sisters were in the school; Mrs. Elsinore herself kept guard over the children, resolved there should be no interruption of the rich man's wooing.

Hildred sat on a low chair by the fire knitting, and Bertram looked at her anxiously enough as he began his story.

"Hildred, I want you to be my wife. I will give you everything you can wish for; you shall be like a queen, and be able to help your father as much as you can desire, if only you will marry me."

He paused. He had said no word of love, and the girl who had once been wooed by a man who loved her with every fibre of his heart felt there was something wanting in this speech, only she could not tell what. There was no mistaking his earnestness; his face was deadly pale, and the veins in his temples stood out like thick, purple cords as he waited for her answer.

"I am so sorry," she said, simply, "but I cannot accept your offer. I have no love to give you."

"Is there anyone else?" he asked, hoarsely. "Or is it only that you do not care for me?"

"There is no one else."

"And you dislike me?"

The girl's beautiful eyes met his frankly enough as she answered,—

"I could not dislike you, because you have been most generous to me and mine; but I do not care for you, and I have no wish to be married."

Bertram sat down and took her cool, thin hand in his burning ones.

"Do you love your father?"

"You know I do. But dad," she spoke quite confidently, "does not wish this."

"He is getting an old man," said Mr. Bertram, gently; "and he has had a hard struggle all his life. Won't you give him a little ease and comfort in his declining years? Be my wife, and I promise you Mr. Elsinore shall have a liberal income settled on him for life. Think how worn and depressed he looks. Hildred, would you not like to see him held his head erect and stand before the world prosperous for once?"

The girl shivered as though stricken by a sudden chill. He had touched her tenderest point; she loved her father passionately. His shabby clothes and bowed figure hurt her day by day.

"I want to marry you," said Bertram, letting a ring of authority sound in his voice, "and I mean to do it. Listen, Hildred, hear what will happen if you refuse me."

"Please, don't!" she cried, "you torture me."

"Nay, dear! I have paid your father's debts; and he thinks, poor fellow, he can get on, but the value of the living is depreciated from every source till his income is barely two hundred. While the children were little he might manage; now that they are growing older it is impossible. Mrs. Elsinore may be a good manager, but she cannot feed and clothe eleven people on four pounds a week."

"Heaven will help us."

"Heaven has not helped you much at present. Do you know your father's health has begun to fail? He complains of languor and

a constant pain in his chest. I know something of disease, Hildred, and I can see the first symptoms of consumption. Give him plenty of nourishing food, rest, and above all, peace of mind, and you will keep him to a green old age. If he is to be harassed, and half starved, you won't have him a couple of years."

"Mr. Bertram!" cried Hildred, bitterly, "why do you tell me all this? Why do you taunt me with our poverty?"

"Because I would have that poverty ended for ever. I want you to become my wife, and to let me care for you and yours."

"And you know I do not love you."

"I know it; but I believe you care for no one else."

There came back to her, as in a dream, the pretty house in Daffodil Road and the memory of the young soldier whose handsome face had charmed her girlish fancy—she had only seen Hugh Trefusis that once—her remembering him all this time could not surely mean—that she loved him.

"Think," went on Guy Bertram, regardless of the misery he caused. "Think of what your life will be if you send me away—hard, grinding poverty."

"I would go away," she trembled, "and work for my bread."

"Mrs. Elsinore would not let you. The highest salary you could procure would not do much to help her with her large family. If you send me away she will be simply furious. She will not let you go away to make a new home for yourself. She will keep you here under her harsh rule, and reprobate you a dozen times a day with all you have deprived her of. Your father will not only have to bear poverty and hardships, he will have no domestic peace. Your step mother will taunt him continually with all your selflessness has lost her."

The knitting dropped from Hildred's hand. A wild despairing cry escaped her, and then she said,—

"Mr. Bertram, you cannot love me, or you would not torture me like this."

"Is not all I have said true?"

"I—fear so."

"Now look on the other side. Marry me, and on our wedding I settle a thousand a year upon your father. My business plans will oblige me to go to Australia in January. I will not even ask you to accompany me. You shall either remain here, and be sure your step mother will be as kind as possible to my wife, or I will take you to Tempest More and install you as mistress of the beautiful old place during my absence. I shall be gone a whole year. All I ask is that you will think kindly of me while I am away and try to feel pleased at my return."

"But," she made a desperate effort to conquer her shyness, "why need we be married first?"

"Because I must leave you my wife. You do not love me, and were you still Hildred Elsinore, someone else might steal you from me in my absence. You must take my name, only so will you be safe."

"I would rather work for my bread," she said, sadly. "If I marry you, it will be only for my father's sake."

"That I fully understand."

"Mr. Bertram, won't you be merciful and leave me free?"

"I will go away if you wish it, but I cannot spare you the consequences of your rejection. I cannot tie Mrs. Elsinore's tongue, or spare you one of her taunts, and I am pretty sure your father would not bring his pecuniary troubles to the man whose honest love his child had scorned."

"Do you love me?" she asked, wearily. "This persecution does not seem to me like love."

"If I did not love you, why should I want to marry you?" he asked her, reproachfully.

"Were you a great heiress, I am rich enough to be spared the suspicion of fortune-hunting. As it is, you know I only want the right to give you my name and wealth."

Hildred might have resisted even then, but from the window she saw her father coming slowly up the gravel path. His bowed form and shabby clothes, the thought of his failing health, his patient poverty, broke down her courage. For herself she would have faced starvation bravely. She could not face it for that loved father! she dared not risk his life being made one long misery by his wife's reproaches if such solid advantages as Mr. Bertram could give were lost to the family. After all, ten people would be made happy without counting her suitor, and her own blighted life was not much to set against the rejoicings of so many. Her decision was made. Every scrap of girlish gaiety had gone; her face was strained and ashen grey as she said to Guy Bertram, "Very well, I accept your offer."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

CAPTAIN TREFUSIS did not meet Mrs. Smith, after their long discussion about the master of Tempest Mere, before he went to London. Copseleigh Down was a long way from Blankhampton Barracks; and though the young officer had seen the clergyman's wife several times at his aunt's house, he was not on those terms of intimacy which would have justified him in calling on her unbidden, so the only human being who had not been taken captive by Guy Bertram's handsome face and pleasant manners had no chance of repeating her arguments against him to Captain Trefusis. But Ada was a woman of ready wit, and when circumstances occurred which added to her fears she was quite capable of striking a blow at the absent squire herself.

The Vicar of Copseleigh Down believed implicitly in Mr. Bertram. Being dimly conscious his wife did not cordially admire him, the kindly man never lost an opportunity of praising Guy to her, and, a week after her meeting with Captain Trefusis, he mentioned that the Squire had gone to Little Netherton to make acquaintance with the Elsinores.

"I had quite a long letter from him, Ada. Of course he gives no hint of such a thing, but I should fancy Mr. Elsinore had written to ask him for assistance. He mentions that the eldest daughter is very beautiful, the image of his lost Blanche. I am not usually romantic, my dear; but really, I couldn't help thinking how very strange it would be if the Squire married this girl. She is Blanche's own niece, you know, and but for Lady Tempest's will would have inherited everything, so there would be a kind of poetic justice in Mr. Bertram sharing his possessions with her as man and wife."

Mrs. Smith looked interested. Perhaps she had a woman's natural curiosity about possible marriages, for she asked a good many questions.

"If the Elsinores are so poor, how do they manage to entertain such a grand person as Mr. Bertram?"

"Oh! he is not staying there. He is at an hotel in Chilton, and goes over every day."

"She must be eighteen or more now," said Ada, reflecting. "Did not her father marry again and have a heap of children?"

"The present Mrs. Elsinore has eight girls. The Squire does not mention them. His letter is all in praise of Hildred. Really, it reads almost like a lover's rhapsody."

"Ah! well, I must go and see about dinner; it is fearfully late," said Mrs. Smith, as practically as though she took no further interest in Guy Bertram and his possible courtship.

Returning after a long round of parish visiting, the Vicar found lunch laid for only one person, and the neat housemaid informed him with great excitement,—

"Missis has gone to London. She said, sir, she'd miss the train if she waited till you came in. The shop in London had sent her all the wrong books for the Sunday-school prizes, and she thought it would be better to go up and choose the right ones herself."

Now, Copseleigh was not an expensive railway journey from London, considering the distance. The whole day's expedition, including lunch and a cab or bus, would be well under a sovereign, and the Vicar was the last man in the world to grudge his wife an outing; but Ada simply detested London, and since the establishment of the parcel post she had done all her shopping through its kindly agency.

"What train will she be back by, Mary?" he asked, anxiously. "She ought not to be out late this bitter weather."

"She said Jim could meet the five o'clock, sir, for her business in London wouldn't take two hours altogether."

It was perfectly true that much more expensive books had been sent than those ordered; but as her journey to London would cost more than the difference in price, Mrs. Smith would not have gone up for that reason. While her husband was speaking of Guy Bertram at breakfast, a most terrible suspicion had seized her.

Supposing her own theory right, and the real Mr. Bertram had died before Lady Tempest, why, then Hildred Elsinore was the lawful owner of Tempest Mere and her grandmother's million, and by marrying her the impostor would not only secure himself from prosecution if the truth leaked out, but would actually continue to enjoy the results of his fraud.

Ada's first thought was to communicate her fears to Captain Trefusis, but as he could not get leave of absence until just before Christmas, he could be of no use to her. To do any real good she felt she must act at once. Besides, Mrs. Smith, though by no means a prude, did not like the idea of calling on a bachelorette, or even of writing to ask him to come to her. No; she knew the names of Lady Tempest's solicitors, she had indeed met the senior partner when before her marriage she was staying at the Mere. She felt sure Messrs. Williams and West were too much of gentlemen to be rude to her, even if she did give them unnecessary trouble, and she believed them honest enough to give her a fair hearing, even though, having admitted Bertram's claims themselves, they would be very awkwardly placed if he proved an impostor.

The Smiths were not rich. Free from such grinding poverty as the Elsinores', they yet needed to be careful, but Ada would have gone without a new dress for years, rather than not have done what she thought her duty, and saved Hildred, as she believed, from an impostor.

Mrs. Smith reached London at one; treated herself to a nice little lunch, for she knew she would not be able to talk well if she were faint and hungry; then punctually at two o'clock she presented herself at the lawyers' office, and asked to see Mr. Williams.

It is only in fiction that solicitors are so fearfully busy that people have to wait for hours in order to see them. Only in fiction, too, are they so high and mighty that their clerks deny them to strangers who have made no appointment. The affable, silver-haired man who presided over the clerks' room, told Ada politely Mr. Williams was out of town for his health, and would probably not be back till after Christmas. His partner was in then and disengaged.

"Thank you. I should be glad to see him," she answered, quietly, handing the clerk a card, and hoping the address on it, Copseleigh Down Vicarage, would give Mr. West some clue to her business since her name was too common to do so.

The lawyer betrayed not the slightest surprise in his clerk's presence. He bowed courteously, and placed her a chair by the fire. Only when they were alone did he ask, sharply,—

"Have you come to me as a client, Mrs. Smith? I remember meeting your husband at Lady Tempest's funeral."

"I have come to you to ask a question," she said, gravely; the quietness of her manner and the conciseness of her language impressed the lawyer favourably. "Supposing Guy Bertram had died before Lady Tempest, to whom would her property have gone?"

"I can't understand why you wish to know," he said, quietly; "it is not professional to discuss 'suppositions.'"

"I am not professional at all," replied Ada Smith, earnestly, "but I have come to London solely to put that question. I am a busy woman, Mr. West, and I assure you I should not have taken such a journey out of idle curiosity."

He looked at her thoughtfully.

"I believe you, madam. You have the rare gift of putting your meaning clearly in a few words. I will answer your question if you will tell me afterwards why you asked it?"

"I agree."

"Well, then; if Guy Bertram had died before Lady Tempest, he could not have fulfilled the conditions on which she left him the property, and everything would have gone to her half-sister, the child or children of her deceased daughter."

"Lucy Elsinore," put in Ada Smith, calmly; "Hildred left only one child, a girl."

"Ah!"

"Guy Bertram, or the man you sent to Tempest Mere in that name, is now paying his addresses to Hildred Elsinore."

Mr. West looked into the fire. He began to entertain a profound respect for his visitor, he almost thought her worthy to be a lawyer, but he was as cautious as she was. He was determined the first step must be taken by her.

"You said just now," began the vicar's wife, "that suppositions were not law. I cannot explain myself without using another."

"I am all attention."

"Supposing an impostor had usurped Guy Bertram's name and property, would it not be his wisest course to marry Hildred Elsinore?"

"It would give him lawfully what he had stolen, unless, indeed, the young lady was a Tartar and kept her money to herself."

Then Ada Smith spoke:

"I believe you were mistaken, Mr. West. The man your partner brought down to Tempest Mere, last August, the man in whose honour the church bells rang joyfully—is not Guy Bertram."

"Then who is he?"

Ada was silenced but not conquered. A pause ensued, then Adam West asked,—

"When did you begin to take up this theory, Mrs. Smith? Before you knew of his matrimonial intentions, or after?"

"Before! I never liked the man. Every one around me praised him to the skies, my own husband among them; but from the first I felt, if he had been all Blanche Tempest thought him, he must have been going to the bad ever since."

"Roughing it doesn't improve a man!"

"Look here, Mr. West, if you tell me you had proof positive of this man's identity, and that you are morally certain he is Guy Bertram, I won't say another word."

"But I can't tell you that, Mrs. Smith. My partner and I differed more over this case than we have differed all the years we have worked together. I pointed out to him we had nothing but strong presumptive evidence in support of his claim. Williams retorted, who but Miss Tempest's lover would have her letters and likeness? and a still stronger argument, if this were not Guy Bertram, who was he?"

"Someone surely must be left of all the people who made up London society ten years ago, and met Guy Bertram when he went everywhere in Miss Tempest's wake—ten years is not a lifetime."

"We asked Mr. Bertram to bring forward some personal friend. He replied he was poor and obscure then, and made no friends."

Ada shook her head.



[*"YOU WERE MISTAKEN, MR. WEST. THE MAN IN WHOSE HONOUR THE CHURCH BELLS RANG, IS NOT GUY BERTRAM!" SAID ADA SMITH.*]

"I was in Blanche Tempest's confidence, and I know that, though poor, her lover came of a good family and moved in the best society. Mr. West, I have brought one of her letters to me here to-day; it contains a description of her fiancé. Don't laugh at the poor child's loving rhapsody. I grant you she may have idealized him, and he might have been a very ordinary man; but there are three facts she mentions that could hardly all be her fond imagination, and not one of them applies to the present Mr. Bertram."

Adam West read the letter in grave silence. Ada felt a lump in her throat. It seemed so cruel that she should use Blanche's poor little confession of love, perhaps to denounce her lover.

The lawyer looked up quickly.

"So tall that she can hardly reach to take his arm; beautiful brown eyes; long, straight hair—regret it does not curl. Yes, Mrs. Smith, you are right; however much in love the poor girl was, she couldn't have been colour-blind, and the regret about the hair proves she was not mistaken. It will probably be a long and tedious business, but I expect that man is an impostor, and you have set the wheel rolling now that will end in unmasking him."

"And about Miss Elsinore?"

"She must be saved! I suppose Bertram, one must use the name for the time being, won't marry her secretly without a word of warning?"

"I can't say. He wrote to my husband yesterday, and his letter was full of her beauty."

"Oh! Well, if he has only been there a week, she can't be very desperately in love with him. He must be nearly twenty years her senior. It's an amusement I'm not fond of, but one of us must write her an anonymous letter."

"But what good will that do?"

"If she is not in love with him, but is being

persuaded to marry him just because he is rich, it might make all the difference in the world. If she does care for him, she will be so indignant she will show her father the letter, and he will be cautious and delay the marriage until he has made searching inquiries. There are no men so prudent about securing rich husbands for their children as those who themselves outraged caution by elopements or something equally rash."

He wronged the poor Rector of Little Netherton, but his argument was sound in the main.

"Has Bertram seen your writing?"

"Never."

"Then you had better manage the letter. A lawyer's hand might frighten them, and make them suppress it; a lady's writing will pass more easily."

"But I've no idea what to say."

"Oh, I'll manage that. Here," and he tore a blank half-sheet of rather elaborate paper from a letter he had received that morning, "I'll dictate if you write."

And Ada Smith took up a pen and obeyed him, feeling the while that she had embarked on a sea of conspiracy, and wishing the matter safely over.

"DEAR MISS ELSINORE,—

"As one who loved your mother's sister very dearly, I write to warn you of your danger. Do not marry the man now seeking your favour. He is utterly unworthy, and cannot give you one of the things he has promised. Friends are busy working for you even now, and if you will only be brave and give no promise, before long you will find all your troubles removed. If things get very trying, write to 'Hope,' Kingsleigh, Beckenham, and advice and counsel shall be sent you."

"Who lives at Kingsleigh?" asked Ada Smith, when she had written the last word.

"I do; and I have a good old aunt, who keeps house for me, and would be quite capable of sheltering a distressed damsel if need be."

"And what shall you do?"

"About—"

"Guy Bertram. I mean about proving him an impostor."

"If he is an impostor, the man who put us on his track and received fifty sovereigns for doing so is a confederate. Oddly enough, he disappeared soon afterwards. I shall advertise for him."

"But—"

"If he is 'straight' and really believed the man he sent us to was the one we were looking for, he will suspect no evil, and turn up as soon as he sees the advertisement."

"But if it were a plot, and he is a confederate?"

"Why, then, my dear lady, there's only one course open to him, and I expect he'll see it—flight. If we found him, we should have him up in no time for obtaining money on false pretences, and probably prosecute him for perjury as well."

(To be continued)

WINDMILLS are of great antiquity, and are stated to be of Roman or Saracen invention. They are said to have been originally introduced into Europe by the Knights of St. John, who took the hint from what they had seen in the crusades.

There will soon be no hour of the day or night when we cannot obtain a stamp, and an envelope into the bargain. The machinery used for this boon is simply of the penny-in-the-slot type, and, by an arrangement with the Postmaster General, who, it is said, has interested himself keenly in the idea, the delivery machines will be placed in close proximity to all receiving houses and wall-boxes.



SIR CHARLES MAXWELL HELPED THE DAINTY FIGURE TO MOUNT INTO THE PHANTOM!]

## TWO WOMEN.

## CHAPTER XI.

Hester did not respond to Lady Thurso's enthusiasm—she held herself so proudly and so coldly that Violet's embrace was cut short, and her enthusiasm repelled, and she could indeed have willingly struck her step-sister a furious blow in this moment; not only for the recolute contempt which she could not fail to read in Hester's whole bearing, but because with her sharp woman's eyes and understanding Violet realised that her power of power might be wrested from her by this most hated girl, who had suddenly developed from a sallow, lanky, unformed young creature into a divinity of loveliness, possessing indeed a beauty, a grace, a dignity, which last was a thing even she, with all her charms, could never attain. However, it was not the moment to let the faintest hint of her vexation and jealous discomfort escape her; she was perfectly aware Charles Maxwell's dark scoffing eyes were upon her, and she was acting on purpose to impress him and him alone.

"Am I not good to come so soon?" she cried, with her rippling laughter, which to Miss Graham and to Mr. Chetwynde sounded irresistible and musical in the extreme, but had a very different significance to Hester and the man sitting quietly in the garden chair awaiting future development.

"I simply could not rest till I had been over to see you, dear Hester. I have teased Thurso's life out all day, and at last he had to give in just to please me."

"You are very kind," Hester replied, very coldly, and then she was silent again. There was nothing *gauche* or awkward in her manner, she was simply honest—she neither wished to see Violet, nor to allow her to

imagine that this unexpected visit was welcome in any sense of the word.

Charles Maxwell, watching her every movement with his dark eyes, found something new to admire in each of her attitudes. She was sublime, he said to himself, in her queenly hauteur; beside her, Violet, despite all her fair prettiness, dwindled down into something commonplace and ordinary.

Hester's chilly reception made no apparent effect upon Lady Thurso—she laughed on gaily. She insisted on shaking hands with Mr. Chetwynde, whom she flattered by her declaration she had never forgotten him, though it was now years since her one and only meeting with him; and then she gave a clever little cry of astonishment as Charles Maxwell rose and bowed before her.

"You!" she exclaimed. "You here! What a surprise—what an astonishing thing!"

Hester gave a quick glance at the two—instantly she recalled Charles Maxwell's evasion of the truth the day before. He had known Violet, then, although he had pretended he had merely seen her for the first time as she drove through the village on her way to Sedgebrooke.

Hester's dislike for this man deepened immediately, and something, what she could scarcely have said, roused a feeling of indignation, and a vague sensation of apprehension which was not quite comprehensible to her at the moment, but which she was to understand absolutely as the future unfolded itself in its due time.

Sir Charles replied suavely to Lady Thurso's greeting. They talked the merest conventionalities, but both Mr. Chetwynde—whose lawyer mind had also remembered Maxwell's manner of the day before and put his own construction on it—and Hester were not deceived by their acting, though it succeeded admirably with Miss Graham and

with Lord Thurso who had joined the group on the lawn.

Violet turned to her husband, and nestled her hand in his arm.

"You remember Hester, don't you, Thur?" she said, in her prettiest way. "I think you did meet that first day you came to Sedgebrooke—didn't you?"

"I remember Miss Trefusis perfectly," Lord Thurso said, pleasantly.

He made half a movement to stretch out his hand; but as Hester merely bowed an acknowledgment of his greeting, his hand was drawn back, and he felt chilled and a little hurt.

Though the light was growing dim he could yet see Hester's face distinctly, and an admiration not to be conquered even by her cold, almost repellent manner, rose instantly within him.

Up to this moment he had never given a second thought of remembrance to the girl who had startled him so much that summer afternoon by her sudden appearance on the roadside, and by her curt explanation of her mission there. Truth to tell, Thurso had not been very favourably impressed with Hester; but the image of her lovely step-sister had been dancing before his eyes, at the time blinding his senses and bewildering them into the bargain. So it was not so very wonderful that he should have dismissed Hester Trefusis without further ado from his mind.

He had despatched the letter she had given him to his sister Lady Alice, but, as yet, he had heard nothing more of this letter; and it was with something like a revelation that he gazed upon the girl before him and realised her stately loveliness in all its power and dignity.

Violet's heaven-blue eyes swiftly noted the impression Hester had made on her husband. She turned a little cold with the rush of mingled fear and jealousy that beset her. It was a most painful and new experience for

Violet to come across anyone who could dispute her sovereignty even in the mildest way; but the experience had come now most certainly, and not all the strength of her vanity could permit her to deny Hester's dangerous beauty and power of attraction equal to her own, though of such a different stamp.

She roused herself from her thoughts with an effort, and turned again to the chief purpose of her visit.

"I must introduce you to an old acquaintance, Thurso; but perhaps you know one another—no? Then I must do the honours with due ceremony. Sir Charles Maxwell," she dropped him a dainty little curtsey, "my husband, Lord Thurso."

The two men shook hands and looked at each other in a casual sort of way that grew unconsciously to be critical.

"Wonder Violet never spoke of knowing him before," Thurso said to himself, without, however, the very faintest *suspicion* of jealousy, or, indeed, any antagonism whatsoever. "Seen him about lots of times; danced good-looking chap; bit of a rip, though, if all reports are true. What on earth is he doing down in this place? Not exactly the sort of person one looks to find in a young ladies' school!" and then Thurso turned his eyes involuntarily on Hester's form that was walking to meet Leonore, who was lumbering across the lawn from the house, and as he did so he found himself as involuntarily frowning; though, really, if he had stopped to analyse his feelings, it must have struck him as a very absurd and exceedingly prejudiced thing for him to object, even in a vague, uncertain way, to couple the thought of Hester and this man together.

On his part, Charles Maxwell looked at Violet's husband coolly, scrutinisingly, in a certain sense admiringly. His chief feeling, however, was pity.

"Poor devil!" he said to himself. In that instant of acquaintanceship Maxwell gauged Thurso absolutely. He knew him to be as white, honest, and honourable as he himself was black, dishonest, and dishonourable.

He did not envy his successful rival these good qualities, nor was he envious of Thurso's handsome physique, he was very well satisfied with his own appearance; but he was generous enough to be sincerely sorry for the young man, for he knew Violet, and he was well-assured the golden-haired little siren had not failed to make the best possible use of the past two years, and was now, no doubt, a skilled mistress in those arts which she had employed so well in his own case.

Yes, he pitied Thurso, for he could read a little into the future of this marriage, and he saw that misery and great unhappiness must be the lot of Violet's husband, as, indeed, it must be for any man who put, as he swiftly saw Lord Thurso had done, his whole trust and faith and honest admiration into his love for his young wife.

He was not surprised in the least that this man should be blinded and bewitched by Violet's ethereal loveliness; he had been blinded and bewitched himself, and it was always a very sore subject with him to remember that he had been made a fool of by this girl.

He did not set himself to work seriously, however, to mete out to her the punishment he had threatened her with when last they had met.

In fact, as Violet's injured vanity had immediately guessed, he had grown almost indifferent towards her and her punishment, and this state of affairs had become more certain since he had engaged himself to marry Leonore Leighton, and had come in contact with Hester Trefusis.

Love—real, true, and faintly beautiful for the first time had glanced into Charles Maxwell's selfish heart. Hester moved the remains of the good that was in him, she touched the lingering embers of a higher nature which his life had been doing its best

to most surely kill out altogether; for this brief moment he loved as he had never believed it possible he ever could love.

Had the chance been given him, maybe he might have redeemed his whole shallow, miserable, dishonourable career by the power of this new-born love.

The possibility was, however, just as great that he might have soon wearied of the good awakened by it, and have returned with double alacrity to his old evil ways. Be that as it may, the chance of tasting the pure sweet fragrant draught of highest human happiness was not to be given him. He was bound away for ever from such a pathway; and had he been a hundred times free, Hester would never have felt anything but repugnance for one who was undoubtedly unworthy such love as that for which he craved.

At this moment Charles Maxwell was not wholly displeased at the advent of Lady Thurso on the scene. She promised him some amusement, and he was by no means averse to taking it. He read her as clearly as an open book, he fathomed her motives and her intentions; he only had a great contempt for himself that he had not read her so clearly in the past, and saved himself the humiliation of being out-tricked and deceived by such a little baggage as he designated her in his own mind.

Not a single thought of Violet's was formulated but that he guessed at it. He had seen her face blanch and fall in her hour of triumph yesterday when she had unexpectedly turned her eyes upon him. He had enjoyed her discomfort.

"*Voila—un mauvais quart d'heure pour vous, madame!*" he had said to himself, and then he had strolled up to the old school-house, and as he went Violet, her radiant loveliness and her possible present uneasiness, vanished absolutely from his mind, and Hester's marvellous soulful individuality rose in its place. How beautiful she was! How divine in her earnest goodness—her youthful reverence for nature and all its glorious works—her proud unconscious dignity, which set her upon a pedestal above and beyond all other women.

"She is a saint," he said to himself, as he watched her walking and talking with Mr. Chetwynde, "mais, mon Dieu! elle est femme aussi."

He fell into a dreamy mood, utterly forgetful of his fate in the clumsy form of Leonore, who sat devouring his passionate handsome face with her shy eyes, and likening him in her simple heart to every noble knight of old dead-and-gone romance, and to every high and good thing in modern manhood. It was her moment of life, poor creature, and yet it was all illusion!

Yes; Charles Maxwell had completely dismissed Violet from his mind—that is to say, when her name was mentioned he had a sort of pleased, amused sense as he pictured pretty thoroughly her feelings at this time, and realized that his time for revenge was come did he choose to make use of it. He decided on doing nothing, however. He was content to let matters drift.

Perhaps he was unconsciously guided in this by the knowledge of Hester's supremacy over her step-sister, and of the punishment Violet must endure through this fact; and perhaps, too, his keen cynicism prompted him to act as he did, because he knew that it would be something particularly difficult for the new-made Lady Thurso to digest and support.

That this opinion was absolutely a well-founded one he speedily found, for Violet's haste to seek his presence proclaimed it, and the expression in her blue eyes confirmed it.

"I hear we are to offer you our congratulations, Sir Charles," Violet said, as the introduction passed between the two men; "in fact, I think I must add double congratulations, for you were not Sir Charles Maxwell when I saw you last."

"If I had been," Maxwell remarked swiftly to himself, with a faint glimpse of a smile under his dark moustache, "I don't doubt

our parting would have been very different." Out loud he responded, in his most graceful way, to her words,—"I must ask you, certainly, for congratulations on one score, Lady Thurso—my marriage; for I am a very fortunate man, as everyone knows. Will you allow me to make you known to my fiancée, Miss Leighton?"

He stepped forward, and smiled so gently into poor Leonore's frightened eyes, that he seemed to give her an ephemeral touch of grace, and to sweep away her more striking points of ugliness.

Happiness, indeed, such happiness as was beating for so brief time in Leonore's heart, is a marvellous thing. It has power to transform and beautify as no other human power has. And in this moment, contrasted as she was by Violet's undoubted loveliness, the plain awkward heiress as she stood with her hand resting confidently on Charles Maxwell's arm, seemed to have a touch of charm that was felt by them all.

Hester's lips trembled indeed, as she looked on Leonore. She understood, with her inimitable sympathy, the potent spell that worked such a transformation in her friend. She knew, alas! how frail and ephemeral this spell must be; and her young sorrowful heart, versed already too well in the lesson of human suffering, was full of pain and presentiment.

She withdrew gently from the rest and walked into the house. Violet's visit had upset her. She did not know why exactly she should have such a sudden feeling of resentment and repugnance to the sight of her step-sister and Charles Maxwell together; but her intuition was marvellous, it seldom erred; and then she despised the man so absolutely, and she had such good cause to doubt the woman, and then—well, then, Hester, despite her vigorous character and her experience, was after all only a girl, she would have illusions with her throughout her life, but naturally they were stronger at the beginning than they would be at the end, and she could not quite forget how much she had grown accustomed to think over Lord Thurso, the dear nephew Dick whom her dead friend had loved so warmly, and how closely in thought she had grown associated with this Dick and his sister; and then somehow, now that she had seen the young man again and heard his fresh, honest-sounding voice, and looked for an instant into his clear beautiful clear eyes, Hester forgot the resentment she had unconsciously raised up against him since that bygone afternoon; and once more her dream had lived, and lived this time in his real flesh and body, an actual and definite creation, demanding more sympathy than the visionary one of former days.

Hester was very quick at scanning people and making observations upon them. At times she met with difficulties, as in the case of Violet, whom she could not thoroughly understand; but with those clear simple natures like Thurso's she could not make any great mistake, and it was with a sense of keen pleasure that she realized, as she went into the twilight shadows of the deserted schoolroom, that everything was not to be denied her, since she could believe honestly and completely in all the good qualities with which George Campbell had endowed his brother's boy.

It was because of this renewed faith, and pleasure in it, that Hester felt that curious dull sort of evil presentiment as she glanced from Violet to Charles Maxwell, and realised the falsehood and contemptible natures of the two.

As she sat there in the gloaming, with the sound of Violet's high childlike voice floating in on the night air, Hester felt strangely oppressed and sad. Leonore and Thurso seemed entwined together in her thoughts, bound and twisted about by a cruel remorseless fate which would out deeper and deeper into their natures till it reached their hearts, and set the blood of a life-wound flowing.

It was on the face of it exceedingly strange to link a gloomy fate with the bright happy-

looking man whom Violet had married; but Hester knew her thoughts were no light or hysterical ones. As she was, also, only too certain of poor Leonore's misery in the future, so it came to her with sure and a certain prophetic touch that the "nephew Dick," who had grown so familiar a sound in her ears, and had become almost a cherished image in her heart, would taste a misery and a sorrow as great, if not greater, than that which would await poor Leonore Leighton.

## CHAPTER XI.

VIOLET was, undoubtedly, nonplussed by the extremely cold reception Hester vouchsafed to her. Not that she was in the very slightest degree anxious to come into contact with her step-sister; she had, in fact, as may easily be supposed, merely used Hester's name as being the only available reason for that early visit to Helmsdale school; but apart from the fact that she had always a curious idea that Hester could possibly be of some use to her in the future—and to use people for her own ends was Violet's chief aim in cultivating their acquaintance—now that she had come face to face with Charles Maxwell, and read in the very first instant of meeting that the place she had imagined in her satisfied vanity she would hold for ever in this man's heart and thoughts was lost to her altogether, and, more bitter blow than this, was given to another, and that other none else than Hester Treffus, she was seized with a hungry desire to do all in her power to come between Hester and this man's passionate admiration, and to divert the love which she could not ignore, willingly as she would have done so, from this girl back to herself again.

It must in common fairness be said here that in this first moment of astounded and wounded vanity, it was the love of power that actuated Violet almost absolutely. She neither desired nor intended to do wrong; her married life was too new a thing to have had time to pall, and her new and high social position was too pre-eminently satisfactory and pleasant a thing to be put into the smallest jeopardy by any action, however well-excused.

No; it was vanity pure and simple, and jealousy because of that vanity, that took possession of Violet at this moment.

She had no particular desire for Maxwell's social devotion, certainly none for his actual revenge, but she could not endure to be put coolly on one side like a discarded toy, treated with forgetful indifference, dismissed, in fact, entirely by the man whom she had always imagined was not only burning with a desire to be avenged, but was suffering an agony of unrequited and never-forgotten love for her fair sake.

It can easily be guessed how exceedingly disagreeable it was to such a woman to find that not only was this man about to contract a marriage and to become possessed of enormous wealth that made Violet's avaricious heart sick with envy, but he was wholly, unrestrainedly, and madly in love with the one and almost only woman in the world whom she had condescended to hate and now to fear.

Assuredly, Sir Charles might have been pretty content with the punishment that Violet had already received in the mortification meted out to her in the very first half-hour of their meeting.

As she chatted and tried to extract some sort of conversation from Leonore, who had relapsed into her usual clumsy, ugly self again, Violet's brain was full of hot, swift thoughts, of suggestions for future action, of fiercest anger, as she watched the figures of her husband and Charles Maxwell pace slowly to and fro under the trees in conjunction with Mr. Chetwynde.

The three men had fallen into an easy and desultory conversation on sport, politics, and the like.

Miss Graham had gone demurely indoors; she felt a trifle overawed by the presence of an earl and countess in her humble garden, and she had, of course, been completely fascinated by Violet, who won her way into the schoolmistress' heart by her warmly expressed affection for Hester and her cleverly intimated regret at her mother's objection to her step-daughter.

Miss Graham was instantly convinced of Violet's sincerity. She took advantage of it to say with some deprecation some of the things she had always intended should be said to Mrs. Monroe Campbell on the very first opportunity.

"Your mother has completely misunderstood dear Hester's character, believe me, Lady Thurso," she said. "There is every evidence of a high, a noble, an unusually beautiful nature. I hope you will be able to convince Mrs. Campbell of this fact, for," Miss Graham warmed to the subject, "it is extremely unjust that Hester should be branded with a wrong character such as she brought here with her, when it is merely because she is misunderstood and misjudged. Pray let me ask you to convey this matter to your mother, Lady Thurso."

"You can trust me, dear Miss Graham. I love Hester so much, it has hurt me so to see how little mamma has understood her; but it shall all be different now," Violet cried with a girlish burst of impetuosity; "Hester shall no longer be misunderstood. I want to be great, great friends with her. She is so clever, and she knows so much, and I am sure she will be able to help me ever such a lot. You see, I am only a silly, stupid little thing. I always tell Thur—my husband, you know—that he ought to have married Hester and not me, because I am no good at all. I shall never make a grand lady, with proud manners and a long train," and Violet laughed joyously at this description, needless to say, winning the whole of Miss Graham's honest sympathy by her pretty ingenuous ways. "I am a baby—a toy—now Hester is born to be a countess!"

"Hester is born to be a queen!" Leonore Leighton, said abruptly. She was standing awkward and big in the twilight, her eyes following that man's figure under the trees; but she was listening to the conversation at the same time, and at every sound of Hester's name her love and admiration for her friend rose to the surface.

Violet bit her lip suddenly; there was such an intensity, an enthusiasm in Leonore's voice. What power was this that Hester possessed? What charm had come upon her all at once to have wrought such a marvellous change in so short a time? The jealousy that had started up anew and in such big and startling dimensions was increased by this remark of Leonore's; it was another sign of the tide of affairs; it was exceedingly disagreeable to Violet, and she resented it accordingly.

"I must make friends with her; I must get her into my life. I can manipulate her if I have touch with her; but if there is silence between us I shall worry myself constantly, because I shan't know what she is doing. Besides—"

Violet broke off in this train of thought; there was a moment's silence. She could hear Charles Maxwell's voice speaking just beyond; the sound sent a sudden, an unexpected thrill through her. It was a very low, musically-pitched voice; there was something seductive in its slow languorous tones. She remembered how he used to sit and sing to her in those old days in Paris; when, instead of being, as her mother had supposed, safe in the innocent protection of her school, and as her temporary guardians had supposed, deceived by her cunningly-arranged plans and lies, safe in the care of her mother, she had spent days and hours in his society, helped thereto by an intriguing and not particularly conscientious school companion, with whom Violet had fraternized, immediately discovering, with the freemasonry of intuition, a mind similar to

her own in vanity and in vice, for, harsh as the word is, it cannot but be applied to the nature that lived in Violet's lissome lovely body.

Those bygone hours came back to her in these moments, laden with a charm and a sweetness they had never possessed for her in the past. She had played with this man's love as a kitten plays with a cork.

She had drifted into the dangers of an *affaire* from sheer wanton coquetry and vanity. Her school life had lured her to distraction. Her companion had been only too ripe with evil suggestions.

Calmly and deliberately the two girls had arranged a plan for liberty and amusement. They had carried out this plan with the utmost sangfroid, and instantly Violet's wonderful radiant prettiness had spread before her a series of triumphs dear to her vain soul, and doubly seductive because of their secrecy.

Charles Maxwell had fallen a victim to her ingenuousness rather than to her beauty. She was something absolutely fresh in her seeming maidenly modesty; a breath of fragrant spring air, as it were, in the heat of the summer glow of Paris life. Her innocence was delightful; he loved her. It was a sort of temporary madness. It lasted about a month and no longer; and then came the disillusionment, and then the disgust and anger.

Violet, as she sat now in the old school garden, recalled that stolen episode bit by bit. She set it as it were to the music of his voice, and she felt some new and thrilling sensations creep slowly into her veins as she did so. It was the first touch of a passion that was destined to become overwhelming in its intensity and hopelessness.

To-night she had no hint revealed to her of this future deviation, only a sort of vague regret and irritation; and for the first time since it had happened she drew this memory of the past from the corner of her mind where she had hidden it so carefully, and looked at it, not with the self-disgust and futile rage that had been wont to come, but with a touch of pleasure and a thrill of vanity in the recollection of the absolute power she had once held over this man.

"And it shall come back—it shall—it shall," she said to herself between her teeth, and then she roused herself with a laugh, and ran laughingly to her husband.

"It is time to go," she cried, "it is ever so late, we have been here an age—those poor horses, they will be tired of standing. Come along, Thur, dear. You must drag yourself away from this fascinating company, and put up with poor little me."

Thurso pressed her clinging hand tightly in his.

"Your word is law, my lady," he laughed, and then he said some pretty words to Leonore, and bade "good-night" to the two men. His eyes went about in search of Hester, but she was nowhere to be seen—he felt a trifle annoyed with her. She certainly was not very gracious to his little love, and Violet had been so good, so tender, and so thoughtful. Why, she had been quite restless all day to go and see Hester.

"I must go—I must, Thur," she had said at least a dozen times. "Poor Hester, she will think me so unkind, and there is no reason to let her think it, for she knows how fond I am of her, and how much I want to see her happy."

And then, when they had been driving over, Violet had prepared her husband a little for Hester's cold manner.

"You must not expect to see anyone very gushing, you know, Thur," she had said, lightly. "Hester is the very very opposite of silly babyish me. She is most undemonstrative and very stiff, and rather—well, difficult, you know; but I understand her, and I know she is so good and does not mean to be disagreeable—she can't help it, you see, but it is only manner, nothing more."

Despite all this preparation, however, Thurso could not help feeling annoyed with Hester's attitude to his wife.

"I know she does not pull very well with her step-mother, and perhaps there may be faults on both sides; but with Violet, my little Vi, who has always been so sweet to her and shown her so much love and kindness——"

And then the young man's thoughts went to that day of his second visit to Sedgebrook, when Violet had been absent so long on a fitful ride in the heat just to pay her step-sister a visit. Yes, most certainly, Violet had been more than kind, and it was, to say the least, very ungracious behaviour on Hester's part to receive such kindness with such coolness.

He should talk to Violet about it, and certainly he should not let his little wife be treated in this way any more. If Hester could not appreciate kind thought and womanly attention, well, then she must do without it, that was all.

"It is a heavenly night for a drive!" Sir Charles said, as he accompanied them to the mail phaeton, and took a critical admiring look at the cattle in it.

"Why don't you come too? there is lots of room, isn't there, Thurso?" Violet said, as she twisted some delicate silk wrap about her, and stood on the steps looking like some lovely child in the pale silver of the moonlight.

"Shall be charmed," Thurso said, of course; though he had been, lover like, looking forward to the long drive alone with Violet through the soft night air.

Sir Charles thanked them both.

"I will accept your offer another time; to-night I have been promised the delight of hearing Miss Trefusis sing, and I cannot forego that, even for a drive with you, Lady Thurso."

Violet flushed hot with rage, while her husband said, casually, really for something to say,—

"Does she sing so well then?"

Maxwell replied, with quiet emphasis,—

"It is the most heavenly voice I have ever heard, and she is such an artist—she sings absolutely divinely."

Violet laughed, shortly.

"So I should think she ought; I believe her mother was an actress or something of the sort. I have often told Hester there was something theatrical about her."

Thurso frowned suddenly; this speech hurt him, coming from Violet; it was in execrable taste, and the tone of the voice was not in Violet's usual voice. He put it down swiftly, however, to a natural feeling of annoyance at Hester's cold treatment.

"Music is a divine gift," he said, speaking, however, mechanically, and across his mind had come the memory of his first visit to his uncle's widow, the hot, sunlit gardens, the striped tent under the trees, and the sound of that young passionate voice coming from within the tent. It had been Hester Trefusis singing.

Even that brief acquaintance with her musical gift told him that Charles Maxwell was not in the least exaggerating the value and beauty of her voice.

"Are you ready, my darling?" he said to Violet.

Lady Thurso gave her tiny hand to Sir Charles.

"*Adieu*! I have been arranging a luncheon with Miss Leighton one day next week. You will, I hope, accompany her, Sir Charles."

He answered with a light laugh,—

"Where Miss Leighton goes, naturally there go I."

He bowed with his own consummate grace—a grace that made Violet think her husband's strong athletic form almost ugly and clumsy.

"I shall be delighted to visit you at Sedgebrook Park, Lady Thurso."

He helped the dainty figure to mount into the phaeton, settled her skirts, and paid her every attention; but he was very cool about it, and his eyes had not even a scintillation of

the old passionate admiration that had once lived in their depths so completely.

"Handsome chap that," Lord Thurso said, as he gave his bays their heads, and they trotted swiftly down the road. "Did not know you know him, my little love?"

"I had forgotten that I did," Violet answered, in her lightest manner, "it was so long ago, years now. Once when I was—" Violet paused a little, she was going to introduce her mother's name, and embroider a fiction thereon, but she refrained. She did not intend to draw her mother into her life at all. In fact, as has before been hinted, she intended to get her mother out of that life as quickly as she possibly could. "When I was staying with a school girl friend in Paris he was a friend of her brother's. I saw him once or twice. I remember now." Violet continued, in a meditative sort of way, "I never liked him very much. I know Olympe, my schoolmate, you know, Thurz dear, said her brother had told her Sir Charles—only he was not Sir Charles then—was not a very good man, and I have always disliked bad people. I don't know what I think they will do to me," Violet added, with a touch of her very young laughter, "but I believe I am frightened of them, Thur. Now am I not quite the silliest person in the whole world?"

Thurso looked down at her delicate childish loveliness. There was a world of meaning in the moment's silence that ensued before he answered her. It was the freshness, the seemingly unutterable beauty of his wife's innocence, the tender bloom of an unsophisticated mind that was almost her great charm in his eyes; and Violet, having gauged this, instantly knew, to the minutest detail, how and where to touch him most.

She laughed inaudibly to herself as, bending down and resting one hand for a second on her small ones, he made reply in a quick reverend sort of way,—

"No, my dearest, you are not. You are my dear, gentle, pure little wife; and every thought you have, every instinct you possess, is goodness and wisdom itself."

Violet gave forth some pretty childish answer, but she was in a fretful excited mood. Her vanity could not fail to be pleased by her husband's adoring love, and yet to-night, while it pleased her, it irritated her. She had the first sensation of weariness with him, and his very faith and trust in her made her half contemptuous towards him.

She had always worked to make people fools and to bend them subservient to her unscrupulous desires and boundless ambition, yet now she was almost angry with Thurso for fulfilling her wishes so absolutely, and for being so entirely blinded by her.

It was the unconscious contrast with Maxwell; beside his character Thurso seemed more than feeble.

"He will be tiresome by-and-bye," she said impatiently to herself, as they drove through the mellow moonlight back to her splendid home. "Thurso is one of those certain foolish creatures who generally develop into becoming so dreadfully dull."

She leaned back in her seat with her silken wrap hugged closely about her; her thoughts conjured up once again swiftly before her the image of the man they had just left—the dark, picturesque face, the cruel, sensual mouth, the eyes with their lurking devilry—their keen, cold power, hiding yet revealing, the passion that burned beneath.

Violet's heart thrilled once again in that odd, nervous fashion. The charm in Charles Maxwell's face, in his whole personality, touched her in a way she had never been touched before, and yet she was quite honest with herself.

"When he was mine, all mine, when his joy would have been to kneel before me and let my foot be set on his neck, then he was nothing to me. I almost hated him, he was so foolish, so reckless, so stupid, and so much in earnest."

Violet moved a little uneasily in her seat.

She was so quiet that Thurso half thought she had dropped asleep. He stole tender glances at her now and then—how sweet and infinitely entrancing her delicate face looked in the moonlight with that calm, thoughtful air pushing aside her smiles for the moment!

"He wants me to think he has forgotten. He took every care to impress me with his indifference, but is he really indifferent or—?"

Violet turned her eyes over the country landscape bathed in moonlight; its manifold beauties were lost upon her. For one moment a flush of satisfied pleasure passed over her face as she imagined Charles Maxwell as cloaking his real, unaltered feelings beneath an assumed air of coolness and indifference; but the next thought chased away this fleeting pleasure, for it brought before her not only the remembrance of his near approaching marriage, but also the remembrance of Hester's marvellous beauty, and the expression that beauty had called forth in the eyes of this man who so occupied and disturbed her mind.

Violet bit her lip so sharply as to almost bring blood. The full strength and venom of her nature was called forth into being by the mere thought of Hester as a possible and a successful rival. Violet knew she possessed a vigorous mind, that she had enormous will power, and an unusual amount of concentrated energy and courage to carry out any undertaking she desired to do, but she was vaguely startled by the new chord that this night's events had touched within her.

She was restless and dissatisfied at the knowledge; not because of the hot burning hate and jealousy that came for Hester, but for that intense sort of longing, that grew greater as the moments sped by, to have Maxwell at her feet for a second time—not for the pleasure of being his conqueror, as it had been in the first instance, but for the delight of feeling he belonged to her, and that a bond of sympathy and understanding existed between them.

Hester, however, haunted her thoughts; look which way she might, that cold, proud, statuesque face was before her—the face that, though proud and cold, almost to a fault, yet betrayed a greater enchantment, a more vivid charm and beauty, in the unconscious warmth and soul that lay in the depths of those most exquisite eyes.

She found herself speaking of her step-sister, suddenly.

"Hester has grown very pretty, don't you think, Thur? Perhaps you don't remember her very well, you only saw her for a moment that first day you came; but she is wonderfully improved. You find her pretty, don't you, Thur?"

Thurso answered without a moment's hesitation,—

"More than pretty, my little love—in fact pretty is the last word to apply to Miss Trefusis, she is so proud, so queenly. I call her really beautiful."

Violet could not speak for a moment.

"More beautiful than me?" she asked, her anger and jealousy making her voice tremble. This praise of her rival was nothing less than torture to her; in this moment, too, she almost hated her husband for his undisguised admiration of another.

Thurso bent down his handsome head.

"Little Vanity," he said tenderly, and then gently, "My little love is the most beautiful creature in all the wide world to me, she knows that!" he said.

Violet tried to laugh easily, but it was an effort, and her husband felt that it was.

"To you perhaps; but to others who know if Hester would not be considered the most beautiful!" the voice was fretful with a touch of real pain in it.

Thurso was silent a moment or two. Violet's overweening vanity, her greed for admiration, was something that had come to him almost as a sorrow. He made every excuse for her, however; he put down all to her extreme

youth, to that pretty babyish delight in herself and all belonging to her; yet he troubled about it a little—it was something that might grow into a cloud on the clear brilliant horizon of their future.

He was no fool, this young husband, he knew his world and humanity pretty well; and although he had the greatest sympathy for human nature, with all its foibles and weaknesses, he knew by experience that big things generally spring from little ones, and woman's vanity was not by any means the least of these little ones.

He said no more to Violet. There were some things, as has been pointed out, that were impossible of being comprehended, much less discussed by her, and the word philosophy was absolutely of no import in her pretty ears.

He lifted her down from the carriage when they reached the big stone entrance, and he held her a second pressed to his heart.

"My dear and lovely little fairy, are you very tired? You are so silent. What!" with a slight laugh, "still troubled about your possibly disputed beauty?" My dear wife," Taurus looked down at her gently, "what would it matter if all the world found you even ugly, so that you were still beautiful in my eyes, and—"

"Thar, you are horrid!" Violet escaped from his hold, she stood a little away from him. "It would matter this much," she said, in a cold, deliberate sort of fashion, "that—I should just break my heart and die. I want more than you. I want the world to admire me and say I am beautiful, and I will have it. Yes, I shall have it without any fail, be very sure of that!" She turned and flitted indoors after this, leaving her husband looking after her with eyes that had a sudden mist over them, as though tears had come from an aching heart.

The world, Violet had said; but as she went up to her room, still furious with Taurus, she reduced the world and its adulation to the person of one man, and that man the one whom she had despised two years ago as strongly, as vehemently, as she now desired to win him.

(To be continued.)

## A PLAYTHING OF FORTUNE.

### CHAPTER XXXI.—(continued.)

"Tell me about her," Violet said, feverishly. "I, too, am fond of the baby, and would know all about him. Was she pretty, Agnes?"

Agnes hesitated.

"Pardon me, madame," she said, after a slight pause; "but when I came here Mr. Warrender said that I was to answer no questions."

"But if I promise not to betray you?"

"Then, madame—"

"There, Agnes, I confess to being, like all women, filled with curiosity. Go on and tell me. I promise that I will never speak of what you say. Was the mother a pretty woman?"

"She was the most beautiful girl I ever saw. One could scarcely call her a woman, she was so young."

"How old?"

"Not more than eighteen or nineteen."

"Was she like the baby?"

"Very. Her eyes were exactly the same. I never saw a stronger resemblance than they bore to each other."

"She and—her husband were very fond of each other, were they not?"

"They adored each other."

Violet started. If this woman had adored her husband, how was it that she had asked Lionel to adopt her child?

"Are you sure of that?" she said, endeavouring to speak quietly. "I supposed that she—that she loved—another?"

"Oh, no, madame! She loved only him. I never saw a man grieve as he did when she died."

"Then he is still alive?"

"Yes, madame."

"Then how is it that my husband has adopted his child?"

Agnes did not reply. She had prepared the net purposely in which she had been caught, and her apparent confusion was exceptionally good acting.

"You need not be afraid to tell me," exclaimed Violet.

But Agnes' apron was to her eyes.

"Please don't ask me, madame," she sobbed. "I should never have answered your questions. Now, if you betray me, he will never forgive me, never!"

"But I shall not betray you, you silly girl! Go on and answer me."

"How should I know, madame? I only know that your husband adopted the child, and that is all."

Violet sat musing for some moments, her handsome face dark as night.

"Agnes," she said at last, "there must be some picture of this woman in existence. I promise you that I will be a very good friend to you, and I know well how to be a friend, if you will tell me where to get it. Surely you know of some such?"

"Yes, madame," she faltered.

"Where is it?"

"It is in the locket on your husband's watch-chain, madame."

The answer was given hesitatingly. Violet rose quickly from her chair. She had never been so agitated in her life.

"I shall not forget my promise. You may go!" she said, almost curtly.

Then when the door had closed upon Agnes she flung herself down again, looking before her with eyes that saw nothing.

"The likeness is in his locket!" she murmured. "I will see it; and I will know this secret—I will know it!"

### CHAPTER XXXII.

DARCY BROOKS did not order his trap to drive to the little village, but with a cigar between his lips and his favourite dog at his heels, he strode down the country road that was bordered with trees, endeavouring to think out some possible path in that future that lay before him.

"Confound it!" he muttered, puffing the fragrant smoke from between his lips, "if a fellow only knew what to do, no matter how much hardship the doing involved, it would be easy enough; but when every course seems plunged in the blackest of darkness, how is one going to discern anything? I can't even grope my way, for there is nothing to feel or hang on to. There is that girl, Violet Cifton, living with Lionel yet not his wife. She is innocent of wrong, of course, yet the world would utterly ostracize her if it knew. It would kill her. She is so sprightly-spirited that she could not endure a blow like that. I believe if the shock did not kill her at once, she would die by her own hand. Then there is that infernal secret that Lionel has sacrificed every principle of his life to guard. If a fellow only knew what it was! But I don't, and that settles it. Then there is Brenda and—

—and that child! Heigho! There seems to be no more possibility of framing the horrible situation in words than there is of getting out of it. And the worst of it is that I can't go and ask the advice of anyone. I absolutely feel dizzy. Those two poor girls have left the whole thing to me, and I am no more capable of dealing with the situation than a baby. What a perfect little brick Brenda is! There are not many girls in the world who have acted as she has."

He continued musing as he went his way, but there was no more definite solution of the problem that was puzzling him than there

had been the night before. He lifted his hat mechanically and smiled to a few people who passed in their carriages, and then carelessly entered the primitive post-office.

There were several letters given him: one from his tailor, two or three cards for receptions and dinners, a letter from a cousin in Germany, then—

He curiously turned the last over in his hand, and looked at the postmark several times. The writing was somehow familiar, but he could not quite remember where he had seen it. He could not analyze the curious feeling that oppressed him, though it is doubtful if he tried. He could not tell why, but he did not tear the envelope from it until he was alone in the lane again; then, with nervous insistence, he ripped it off.

"Gone!" he ejaculated, when he had read it through for a second time. "Gone! Bessie suspected that she would do it, but I did not. Gone! This has made the situation worse than ever. What is to be done now?"

He read the letter for the third time, as if that might throw some light upon his dilemma; then muttered,—

"What a curious letter! I wish to Heaven I could read between the lines, for it contains something more than appears on the surface. I am quite convinced. 'Let no day go by without your seeing her. Make her feel your tenderness—your regard.' I wonder what she means by that? I don't believe I had better let Bessie see this letter. Good Heavens! What am I to do?"

He walked very rapidly, seeing nothing and hearing nothing, busy with his own thoughts; but before coming to the gates of Riverview he slipped the letter into his pocket and walked more leisurely toward the house.

Bessie was already upon the lawn to meet him. His repressed excitement might have told her that he knew, had not her own been too great for her to see.

"I thought you would never come!" she cried, half wildly, as she put out her icy hands to him. "I have sent everywhere for you, but no one could find you. Oh, how shall I tell you? What I feared has happened. Annie has gone!"

"Where?" he asked, hastily. "Did she write to you?"

"Yes. Here is the note she left."

He took the fluttering bit of paper from her hand. His own shook as he read the lines:

"There is a day in the far future, which I foresee, when I shall return to you."

He repeated the words again and again to himself. Was there not something between the lines here, too? he asked himself. But what—but what?

Bessie was looking breathlessly at him, but he had forgotten her. He was not recalled to himself until she touched him upon the arm.

"Well?" she gasped.

He started and coloured almost as a girl does. He returned the letter to her with a feeling of constraint which he could not understand.

"What do you think?" she asked, as he was still silent.

"I don't know," he answered, dully. "I seem to be too much paralyzed to think anything. I did not believe she would go. Was there any reason for her doing it just now?"

Bessie shook her head.

"No. I never dreamed she would do it just at present. But what is to be done? We must find her at once. But how are we to begin?"

"Don't you think," he stammered, remembering Brenda's admonition to him, "that we might let things take their own course just for the present? Might it not be just as well for us not to try to find her until we have decided upon some course to pursue?"

"No!" cried Bessie, earnestly. "How can you counsel such a thing? She has no money. I don't believe she had twenty dollars in the world when she left here! She is ashoreless

as a child. She will starve, I tell you. And even if that were not so, do you think I would leave her to bear a sorrow like hers alone?"

"But—"

"Oh, how can you make a plea against me when I thought you would turn the world to help me find her! You have disappointed me. Let me tell you something, Mr. Brooke: I don't believe that you and Annie have told me all the truth. I believe that she has concealed something from me because she thought it was for my happiness that she should do so."

"What do you mean?" asked Brooke, uneasily.

She lifted herself in her invalid's carriage and looked at him as if she would penetrate to his very soul.

"I mean that I believe she was more to Lionel than she would tell. She was good and pure as an angel. You have said so yourself, and I know it was true. And yet that child is hers! You know that she was more to Lionel than she was willing to admit—you know that she was his wife!"

"Bessie!"

If a bomb had exploded at Brooke's feet he could not have started more violently. Her speech had not at all prepared him for its close. She lifted herself yet higher, and caught his arm, her face crimson under its excitement.

"It is true!" she whispered, below her breath.

"You are mad!" he gasped.

"I was mad not to have seen it long ago—either mad or a fool! Do you think you can deceive me as to why she has gone? She knew that my sister was no wife, and to save us the disgrace of it all, she has given up more than her life—her honour and her love. Oh, Mr. Brooke! how could you let her do it?"

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed, with an affection of roughness, remembering his promise to Brenda in that boudoir. "You women are always jumping at conclusions, and then building great theories upon them. Do you think Lionel Warrender was such a scoundrel as that?"

"You spoke yourself of mistakes and lack of trust. And then, do you think that I do not recall the fact that he believes her dead?"

"It is perfectly absurd!" exclaimed Brooke, loftily. "And even were it not—ever if it should be as you so romantically and ridiculously put it, what would there be to do under those circumstances?"

He listened almost breathlessly for her reply.

"Tell the truth!" she cried, earnestly. "Tell the truth to the whole world!"

"And disgrace your sister eternally?"

"Do you think that I would pause to consider that? It is the right and wrong of it alone that bears upon the case, not my sister's personal happiness."

Brooke paused a moment, then said, with an affection of lightness,—

"That is very pretty in theory, but it would not do to work upon. You would all be disgraced, ostracised. The right or wrong of it would have nothing to do with the opinion of the world."

"Do you think we are so low, morally, that we would consent to save ourselves at the expense of another? Not if it cost life—yes, even soul!"

There was something so noble and pure in the expression of the face that was upturned to his at that moment, that Brooke could almost have given up his own life to have saved her the sorrow he felt sure must come. A great, tender light crept into his handsome dark eyes. He bent his head and kissed her hand.

"It is very noble and brave of you, little one," he said, gently. "You must not fly at conclusions like that. There is nothing that can be done, at least not just now. Will you trust me, Bessie?"

"Yes," she said, faintly.

"Then," he said, gravely, "leave this matter to me! I am a little afraid of Best, and want him to suspect nothing. Don't tell him that Brenda has run away, but that her father or uncle or someone is ill, and that she has gone home for a little while. You make no move in the matter, but lead your servants to believe that you know where she is. I will do what is possible to find her. You believe that, do you not, Bessie?"

"Yes."

"And you will leave it all to me—every thing?"

"Yes."

### CHAPTER XXXII.

It was a pretty picture that they made Lionel and the baby. The grave, handsome father had the child in his arms, indulging in a romp, and the tiny, dimpled creature was laughing and crowing, making frantic efforts to wind its little fingers in the blonde hair that was too short to insure a hold.

A handsome woman, with a curiously rigid expression of countenance, had entered the room without the knowledge of either, and stood there watching in silence while the play went on. Her hand was pressed above her heart, and she leaned heavily against a table, as if she lacked the strength to support her own weight.

The baby succeeded in catching the blonde head in his arms at last, and held on, laughing gleefully, every dimple in the small, beautiful face in play, two rows of pearly teeth showing deliciously. The man suddenly threw back his head, and catching the little fellow to him, covered the little face with passionate kisses.

"Darling! darling!" he cried, in a sudden frenzy of remembrance, "how like your beautiful mother you are, and how your wretched father loves you!"

The sentence ended in a groan, and at the same moment a heavy paper-weight fell from the writing-table to the floor. The violent start of the listener had caused it, and instantly Lionel Warrender turned.

"I was not aware of your presence," he said, coldly. "I beg your pardon. Won't you have this chair?"

"Thank you. What are you going to do?"

"To ring for Agnes to take this child to the nursery."

"Why should you? Give him to me, please."

Violat had fully recovered her composure, and was as cool, as all outward appearance, as he. He hesitated a moment before complying with her request, then placed the baby in her arms.

She looked at it long and earnestly, while he stood looking down upon them both, half wishing that she knew the truth, praying for a better feeling to exist between them, yet without the courage to tell her the truth. There was something in the picture that strangely attracted him.

"He is a very pretty child; don't you think so?" she asked, quietly.

"Very," he answered, briefly.

"And he is like his—mother?"

"Exactly."

"And yet I have sometimes fancied that there was another look in his face—a look of—"

She did not complete her sentence, and after a significant pause, Lionel said, calmly,—

"Well?"

But she did not go back to the broken sentence. She turned her eyes in his direction, and looked searching at him.

"Did it ever occur to you," she said, slowly, "that there are persons who might misunderstand—misconstrue your affection for this child? You make no pretence of concealing your love for him, to the exclusion of the whole world besides?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that in your absorption of self, did it ever occur to you that there might be unpleasant comments made? The child has many expressions like you. There are those in the world who will say—"

"Kindly let us drop all that," exclaimed Lionel, haughtily. "I am not in the least interested in what the world is likely to say of me."

"Then I am; and surely there is a little consideration due me. My mother has spoken to me of your devotion to the child. Everyone notices it—everyone is commonting upon it. You are utterly oblivious of me and of my rights as your wife. The child is all very well; but I do not wish to be made the laughing-stock of the town because of him."

She bent her head and touched the child's brow with her lips as she spoke, and Warrender's heart awoke him.

Had he done that which she had said? He feared it was but too true. And she was kind to the child. She had kissed it, and kisses were not particularly plentiful with Violet. A great feeling of play for her came over him. After all, she must have loved him or she would never have married him. Those thoughts, and a thousand more, surged through his brain. He was making his life miserable—not his alone, but hers—because of a past mistake, and memory that ought to die.

Had he the right to do it? He had been very selfish, but he would be no longer. He sat down beside her, and bending his head, he kissed the hand that covered that of the baby.

She blushed like a school-girl.

"Have I done that, Violet?" he asked, gently. "I have been very thoughtless, very careless, very selfish, but if you will forgive me, I shall take great care that it shall be no more."

She looked up at him and did not reply. Those words that she had overheard were ringing through her brain: "Darling! darling! how like your beautiful mother you are, and how your wretched father loves you!"

He sat there playing with a ribbon on her gown, and watching her closely.

"Is it all beyond forgiveness?" he asked, quietly, at last, as she did not speak. "Is there nothing that you can say to me? Every day since we swore to love each other before the altar, we have seemed to be growing farther and farther apart."

"Whose faults has it been?" she cried out, fiercely. "Whose—"

"Don't!" he exclaimed, soothingly—"don't let us quarrel. It has been mine—all mine—and that is the reason why I ask your forgiveness. I see how wrong I have been, and I am anxious—eager to begin anew. Won't you try, Violet? Why should we make our lives a torture because we have begun in that way? We have not been very kind or forbearing with each other, and, oh! it has been such a mistake! I grant you that I have done wrong, hideously wrong, but I want to right it if I can. Will you help me?"

She hesitated for some time, then turned to him with a curious light in her eyes. She spoke quickly, almost incoherently.

"On one condition," she exclaimed. "There must be no secrets between us. Tell me the truth! Open the book of your past to me, and I promise to do as you ask."

He sprang to his feet, and walked hastily up and down the room many times. His brows were closely knit; his whole frame trembled with emotion. Not even upon that morning, when he stood beside the open coffin of that drowned girl, did he suffer more than than he did that minute.

He did not interrupt his walk by word or gesture, but sat with the child clasped closely in her arms, her lips resting upon its hair.

It was that picture which decided him, as she intended that it should. He turned suddenly and saw it. His eyes filled with tears. He went swiftly up behind her, and taking

her face in his hands, drew it back and kissed her upon the lips.

"Forgive me, Violet, for doing that without your permission," he said, humbly, "but it may be the last that I shall ever receive. You shall know the truth, let the cost be to me what it will. I have been a coward—a scoundrel! There is no name that could be applied to a man that I do not deserve. You wish to know my past. How is it possible for me to tell you?"

"There is but one thing that I wish to know now."

"And that is—"

"The truth about this child. What was his mother to you?"

She waited breathlessly for the answer, which did not come at once. She saw the greyish pallor that came over his face, and caught the words as they fell like ice from his white lips.

"My wife!"

She did not cry out. Perhaps the horror of it was great enough to dumb her. She sat perfectly still, staring at him in a frozen sort of way. He had turned from her and was looking at the floor, as a criminal does.

"I make no plea for myself," he said, in a tone so low that she could scarcely hear. "I know that there is no punishment that I do not deserve, but I swear to you that it was not to save myself that I remained silent. There was a terrible thing involved which concerns another, and that I dare not tell you; but that was the reason for my silence. I dared not speak. Violet, say something to me! Either bid me go eternally, or speak some word; I cannot endure your silence."

"Wait!" she exclaimed, hoarsely. "There is another question. You loved her, did you not?"

"Yes," faintly.

He was not looking at her, and did not see her wince. It was some time before she could control her voice. When she could, she said, quietly,—

"You have a picture of her in the locket on your chain, have you not?"

"Yes."

"Will you let me see it?"

He took it off obediently, and handed it to her. She scrutinized it carefully, and handed it back.

"But one more question now," she said, coldly. "She is dead, you said. Is that true?"

"It is true."

"That is all. You must give me time to think. I don't know what I can say. You have cruelly, hideously deceived me. There must be no separation. That, you understand, I could never endure, because of the eyes of the world. I must think over the situation otherwise. I will take this child to his nurse. I should prefer that you should not see him again for the present."

That was all. She arose and swept out of the room with the dignity of a queen. He had wronged her, and in her hardness of heart there was no pity either for his humiliation or his repentance. He understood that perfectly, and sighed over his great failure as the door closed upon her.

#### CHAPTER XXXIV.

It was a queer little figure that stood before Doctor Hastings when he entered the room at the Beresford Hotel where the servant invited him.

There was a slight, girlish form of something above medium height, clothed in a plain dark gown, the front of which was half covered by a large apron of snowy whiteness. The hair was slightly gray, and waved down to the ears, from which it was drawn back to a simple knot at the back of the head. A nurse's cap was fastened over it.

Doctor Hastings laughed as he took her hands in his.

"A perfect little Quakeress!" he exclaimed.

"Your face looks absurdly young for the gray hairs, but still they age you ten years. But for the eyes, no one in the world would recognise you. Try the effect of the glasses now."

He took them from his pocket, and she placed them over her eyes.

The disguise was absolute.

It was so simple, yet so perfectly effective, that the doctor was enthusiastic.

"It is without a fault!" he exclaimed.

"There is absolutely nothing in it to attract attention. The soft colour in those nose-glasses makes your eyes look blue. Anyone would pass you without a second glance as an inoffensive, middle-aged nurse. There is but one defect in the whole get-up, and that cannot be remedied. It is your form. Of course, nature takes remarkable freaks sometimes, but I never saw it give a form like that to middle-aged nurse."

They both laughed, but Brenda viewed herself in the glass with great satisfaction.

"I call it immense!" she exclaimed, lightly. "I feel almost as if I had left the old time behind, when I see this change of appearance. I am I no longer, but a new person with a new existence. If I could but annihilate memory!"

"There is a way to do that."

"What way?"

"Work! When persons have nothing to do but sit around and think, how are they going to forget? They absolutely feed upon the poison of the past. It gets into their veins and heart, and the result is not pneumonia, as it would be in physical conditions, but—insanity! Work—work! That is the gradual destroyer of the microbes with which unpleasant memory is infested. We are going to work you very hard at first. There will be no leisure for thought, except in so far as your patient needs it. When you lie down to rest you will be so exhausted, physically, that there will be no question of whether you will sleep or not."

Brenda laughed again over his determined manner.

"I shall be glad of that!" she cried, eagerly. "It is work that I want, work that I need, work for which I am praying. I don't know how I am ever to thank you for your great kindness to me. I think Heaven must have sent you. Perhaps some day—"

"Oh, nonsense! I prefer your silence to your thanks, any day. If I had thought you ungrateful I should never have taken any interest in you. There is not much that I can do. Certainly I can't make your life for you, but you are welcome to what there is. Let us leave sentiment and come back to business. What class of patients do you like best?"

"My experience has been mostly with my father; but I am devoted to little children. If you could give me work among them, it seems to me that I should never grow weary."

"That is fortunate. Do you read the morning papers?"

"I have not done so of late."

"Then perhaps you don't know that the most deadly infection is among children now. It is a peculiar type of scarlet fever that combines curiously with pneumonia, and almost every chance seems to be against the recovery of the patient. It requires not so much skillful as careful, indefatigable nursing. Have you ever had scarlet fever?"

"I don't know; but I am not in the least afraid of contagion."

She did not add how pleased she would be if some such thing would but end her unhappy life; but there was a thought like that at work in her brain—a thought which he read readily enough but upon which he did not comment.

"Nevertheless, you must take the greatest precaution," he said, quietly. "I will tell you what to do when the time comes. There is a patient that I should like to have you go to—two of them, in fact—the only children of a wealthy family. Both of them are danger-

ously ill, though the girl is much worse than the boy. Miss Graham is in charge. I shall be glad to place you with her. She is peculiar."

"In what way?"

"She is singularly efficient. I should not be afraid to leave a case entirely to her. There are few doctors who know so well what to do as she does, and she combines her medical knowledge with great skill as a nurse; but she has one of the gravest faults I have ever known a nurse to possess."

"What is that?"

"She goes to sleep sometimes when it is most essential that the patient should be watched."

"Oh! how could she?"

"Well, you see, the sentiment gets out of the thing after a few months of it, and you come down to solid business. Miss Graham gets tired, and then—well, nature takes things into her own hands. She is a great instructor for an inexperienced girl, however, and I shall be especially glad to place you under her. You must obey her as strictly as you would me; and yet, in a certain sense, you will have charge of her."

"You mean I am to watch her?"

"Yes. She is thoroughly good at heart. She will assist you in every way that she can, and in return you must bear with her weakness, and indulge it as much as you can with safety to the patient and yourself."

"I shall try very earnestly."

"And you will succeed."

"I hope I may."

"Now take off that cap and apron, put on your bonnet, and let us go down to luncheon. After that I shall take you to introduce you to your new friends."

She had taken the precaution during her shopping expedition to purchase a bonnet more suitable to the change in her age than the hat she had worn. Doctor Hastings laughed outright when she put it on.

"That makes a greater change than the cap," he exclaimed. "You look too absurd for anything. You will have to get a room, you know, outside, and it had better be a small one by yourself. Most of the girls lodge two or three together, but you would not desire that. There will be time enough to think of that a little later, however. Mrs. Cass will require your services for at least two weeks, if not longer. Are you ready to go down?"

"Yes."

During the luncheon that followed, Doctor Hastings, in his kindly way, described to her what her new duties would be. She listened attentively, even eagerly, and when he had finished she had a fair idea of what the life of a nurse was like, at least in theory.

"There is one other thing to be decided upon before we set out," the doctor said, when they had finished their luncheon. "By what name am I to present you to the Casses?"

She considered a moment, then answered,—

"French, I think. It can make little difference."

They left the hotel shortly after that, when her bill had been settled, and in a cab they were driven to the sumptuous residence of the Casses. They went immediately to the sitting-room that adjoined the one in which little May Cass lay, and there found the pretty young mother.

She was a butterfly of society, but there was a genuine love for her little children in her heart that no love of fashion could ever strangle. She was pale from care and anxiety, and Brenda's heart went out to her as the young mother took her hands.

"I hope you will be able to do something for my two little ones," she said, tremulously. "It is so hard to see them suffering and to be able to do nothing. Do you think there is any improvement, doctor?"

"I shall be able to tell you better when I have seen them," answered the doctor, with a smile. "You must not get so low in spirits, Mrs. Cass. It always affects little ones."

He went into the room where the children

were, after that, and Brenda was left alone with the mother.

"You know how fatal this disease has become!" she cried. "There is scarcely one in a dozen that escapes. I went into the house of a friend where her little one had it, and I should never forgive myself if my children died, for I should feel myself their murderer."

"You should not think of such things, Mrs. Cass. It is—"

"But how can I help it? It is true. I did not think my children would have it. They seemed to me so safe from everything, and I went headstrong against my husband's wishes. No mother has a right to do such things. I could not bear it if either of them should die."

She interrupted her own passionate utterances to answer a knock at the door. She fell back with a little exclamation when she saw who was there.

"Violet!" she cried. "Great heavens! who admitted you? Don't you know the children both have the horrid fever? Have you forgotten that you may take it to your husband's adopted boy? For Heaven's sake, go back!"

But her visitor gently pushed her aside and entered.

"I have come to you because you are in trouble," she replied. "I want to see the children."

"But you must not! Remember Mr. Warrender's son!"

"What is he to me compared with your children? I want to see them."

"But the doctors, the nurses, will not let you!" cried the unhappy mother, who had herself brought infection to her little ones. "Miss French, for Heaven's sake, tell Mrs. Warrender that she cannot go in there!"

(To be continued.)

## A WOODLAND NYMPH.

(Continued from page 489.)

He tried to feel indignant, but failed utterly. The white, small face (whiter and smaller than he remembered it) laying upon his breast crushed out all anger and all hardness.

Scarcely knowing what he did, he, stooping, laid his lips to hers. The heavy lashes lifted, the dark eyes looked a moment into his; but there was no consciousness in them, and, like a weary child, Aileen sank into blissful oblivion, held close and warm in the strong arms so loth to loose her.

Presently Mr. Fitzroy returned; he had got apartments, there was a cab in waiting at the gates, and a doctor would soon be in attendance. The question was how should Aileen be conveyed from the ruins; Justin quickly settled that by lifting her in his arms and carrying her carefully over the uneven ground.

The lodgings secured were just on the outskirts of the little town, the landlady motherly and capable, and the sight of Aileen in her helplessness moved her to keenest pity.

"You will do very well here," said Justin. "You are fortunate to meet with such a landlady. Now I will go back to 'The George' and settle any account you may wish closed; the doctor says Miss Fitzroy cannot be moved for some time. You will not care to keep two sets of apartments—and I will return to assist you, if I can; I shall get lodgings close by you."

"You think of everything," Mr. Fitzroy, said gratefully. "I do not know what I should have done without you, Branscombe, if my child were to die, I could not drag out my life without her. You don't know what she has been to me; how generously, how nobly she has forgotten herself for me. I can see now—now, when the poor child lies unconscious and

perhaps may never speak to me again—how selfish I have been, and I understand why she has lost all her merry ways," and then he broke into the feeble tears and sobs of old age, whilst Justin stood by him in sympathetic silence.

When he had grown a little calmer, the young man said,—

"Do you wish me to send any message to Mr. Seth Fitzroy?"

"Seth Fitzroy! Oh, don't you know? Poor Seth, is dead, and I have come into my own again. Ah! that is the blackest page in all my life's history. Poor little Aileen—she never would have listened to him, though indeed he loved her well, but for my entreaties and reproaches. It was to save my life and my reason that she consented to sacrifice herself—and then you see, Branscombe, you never came, and she thought you had forgotten her. I don't think she cared much what became of her then. She drooped and changed, losing all her merry ways; and I—because I knew I was the cause of her altered demeanour—grew querulous and often cruel with her. She did not care for wealth or position; I believe she grew to loathe both, because they had cost her so dear. Then Seth was drowned, and so her sacrifice was all in vain. But, Branscombe, if you love her still, if she recovers, oh! you must not take that hope from me, there isn't a man on earth to whose keeping I would so freely trust her as to yours."

Justin had much to think about as he walked back to Tintern, there being no second coach that day, and, despite the fact that Aileen was not only injured but unconscious, his heart was lighter than it had been for many days. He knew now how sorely he had misjudged her; he saw her sweet unselfishness in all its beauty. Oh, not for wealth had she bartered her heart's dear love, but to win happiness for the one who had cherished her through all the years of her happy young life, who had been father and mother to her through infancy up to womanhood. What a fool he had been to doubt her, and how could he ever atone for his folly?

It was days before Aileen woke to consciousness, and then her ankle was so painful that the doctor absolutely forbade her to be moved.

Hour after hour she lay dreamingly watching the floating clouds, and always she nursed in her heart a hope that the dream of a kind face bending over her, as she lay in the Castle grounds, was not all a dream.

At the close of a week Justin was permitted to see her, her father first breaking the news of his presence to her. Once again she was an heiress, and he was no richer than when they first met and loved; but what did she care for that?—he loved her still—and was not that knowledge worth more than all else the world could give? He knew now that of her own will she never had and never could have wronged him; and so she was almost content to wait for his coming.

It was a bright, warm morning when they carried her downstairs for the first time, and she lay upon a couch looking out upon the fair green world, when she heard the step she knew and loved best in all the world.

A moment later and he was with her; his face pale with suppressed emotion, and his eyes instinct with love.

"You have come at last," said Aileen, gently. "Dad has not forgotten to tell me of your goodness, and I am very grateful to you."

She did not look at him as she spoke; but her cheeks flushed and paled alternately, and she could not disguise the love which breathed through her tender tones.

"There must be no question of gratitude between us," Justin said, in a queer, uncertain voice, "and certainly you owe me none. I wonder—oh! my little sweetheart, I wonder if you can forgive my past cruel conduct, and take me again into your love—will you try?"

"There is no need to try," she answered, under her breath; "from first to last I have

held you dear, and I would not change, even if I could. I do not blame you that you thought me guilty; I was terribly wounded at first, but afterwards I learned to understand in what light my conduct must appear to you; and then I could only pray that you would not doubt all women for my sake, and that your happiness lay in forgetfulness of me."

"And now?" he questioned, as he held her fast and kissed her sweet responsive lips, "and now, my darling heart?"

"It would be worse than death to feel I was no longer necessary to your happiness, that you could think of me coldly, and even be thankful that I no more crossed your path."

"But, sweetheart, I am shamefully and horribly poor."

Little dimples played about her mouth and in her pale cheeks.

"I am once more an heiress, and—and—suppose I felt my own utter need of a guide, counsellor and friend, would you—out of pure philanthropy—undertake to fill such an onerous position?"

The happy laughter in her eyes made her so like the old Aileen—the little wood-nymph, as he was won't to call her—that he snatched her close to his heart.

"There is nothing I would not do or suffer for your sake," he said, fervently.

And as she lay in his embrace she thanked Heaven, from the depths of her sorely tried heart, for this great blessing which henceforth should crown her life and shed its glory upon each passing year.

[THE END.]

## EVE'S TEMPTATION.

—o—

It had long been a source of wonder why Eve Agacio, at the age of twenty-five, was still unmarried. Indeed, so far as any one knew to the contrary, she had never even been engaged. She was pretty and she was rich, so of course not without many suitors.

Pretty? Oh, very much more than that. She was beautiful, and with a beauty that was most attractive and unique—with a charm that was all her own.

However, the reason why Eve was not married was a very simple one. She had never loved, and she was the kind of a woman with whom love is an essential.

She had never loved—until Oscar Raynor rose, like a radiant, luminous star, on the horizon of her life.

Then she loved with her whole heart—with the fervor, the passion, the intensity of a nature that was both deep and strong, but whose depth and strength had never until now been disturbed.

So, when the young Englishman, whom she had known for so short a time—for he had but lately come on an engineering expedition to the mines of Salvador—told her that his love was entirely hers, and begged her to be his wife, she responded with a tumultuous joy that was almost pain in its overwhelming radiance.

But Oscar had not only won the heart of the beauty and heiress of the richest coffee planter of the place. Without any effort on his part, he had also attracted the attention of her friend, Irene Balfour; and Miss Balfour, not accustomed to bestow her favours for nothing, was determined that since she could not win him for herself, at least she would do her utmost to prevent his marriage with the woman he loved.

She was the serpent of this lover's Eden, and Eve, utterly without suspicion of any deception from her friend, was an easy prey to any bold intrigue made up in that quarter.

"And, dear Eve, my sweet friend, do you really think Oscar Raynor loves you truly—as you do him—for yourself alone?"

The two girls were sitting under a spreading palm tree, with the luxuriant foliage of the tropical land in which they lived all around them. It was hot even for the tropics, and, as Eve had said, with a laugh, "they were doing nothing most diligently."

She did not look at her companion, but with a slow, lingering smile on her lips, she put one arm backward around her neck.

"I know he loves me," she said, simply.

"How do you know it? What makes you so certain?"

Eve gave a silvery, gurgling laugh.

"When you are in love, then you'll know how," she said.

Irene drew back, leaning against the arm of the rustic bench on which they sat, and if Eve had looked, she could not have failed to see that her friend was deathly white.

"Eve," she said, after a pause, "he does not love you. He loves another."

Eve turned now and looked at her, but only wonderingly. She did not even change colour. She had not grasped the meaning of the cruel words. She continued to gaze at Irene Balfour in sheer, unmitigated surprise, but did not speak.

"He does not love you, though he wishes to marry you. He loves Lillian Burton!"

Eve raised her hand to her head, as though dazed.

Slowly the blood receded from her cheek, and as Irene met the haggard, ashen face, her heart gave one bound of terror, but with no regret at the effect of her words.

"Eve, be brave under this blow!" she said, quickly. "He is not worth your grief. Ah, it pains me that I should be the one to inflict this wound, but surely it was needful to tell you in time. See, read this letter. You recognise his handwriting? Alas, poor girl, what I say is only too true!"

Eve snatched the paper held out to her. It was covered with Raynor's writing, and, without thinking that it was not addressed to her—indeed, because it was not—she read it through.

Then, with one moan, like the wail of a creature stricken to death, she let it fall from her grasp, and slipped down herself upon the ground beside it.

Miss Balfour stooped and picked up the sheet, and read it once more.

"Poor crushed Lily," Oscar had written, "of course we all wish things were different, but with patience, we'll surmount even these obstacles, terrible as they are! My sweet little Lily, do not be afraid—do but trust me. Meet me early in the morning by the twisted olive tree, and I'll tell you how we had better act."

"Irene," said Eve, looking up with strained eyes, "why—I want to know why? If he loves her, why does he wish to marry me?"

Miss Balfour gave a short, dry laugh.

"Innocent and unsophisticated!" she said, with a note in her voice that was almost contempt. "Why? Because you are an heiress—because you are the only child of rich Sonor Agacio, and because, for that reason, you are a most desirable wife for any man who wishes to obtain riches by making a wealthy marriage."

Eve rose and stood before her.

"No, no!" she cried, putting out her hands, as if to ward off a blow. "Not that! He is not mercenary. There must be some other reason. Rather almost any other than that so paltry and ignoble!"

"Well, whatever may be his reason, the fact remains the same," said Miss Balfour, with cold philosophy. "Dearest, I must leave you now, for I have letters to write for the ship that sails in a couple of days."

And, with a treacherous kiss, she disappeared among the trees, but she left the venom of her words behind her.

Eve sat down again to think, if letting thoughts and remembrances rush through her brain like bolts of fire could be called thinking.

Lily Burton, the English girl, whom she

had liked so much! It was growing clearer to her now.

He had known Lillian in England, and when she came here with her invalid aunt, whom everyone knew to be so irritable and fractious that her niece was universally pitied, they met as old acquaintances.

And he loved her—not the too fond woman who, in spite of her previous coldness, had been like fruit too ripe at his welcome touch. It was all too horrible—too humiliating. It was not to be borne.

"Oh, it shall not be!" the girl gasped, with a sudden spasm of jealous rage and indignation. "How dare he live, and be so wily and so false? He shall not live! I could not endure to see him happy with another, and I could not live here or beyond without him. Ah, my love—my love!"

Then she sprang to her feet.

"I will not allow such duplicity—such treachery!" she cried, again listening to the wrathful cries of outraged feeling. "He shall die, and then, then—so will I!"

Her great dark eyes blazed. The blush upon each cheek burned red and deep, and her lips, usually bearing a soft, sweet smile of happiness, were now set so hard and tense that only a narrow line of scarlet was visible.

Catching up her trailing draperies of creamy gauze, a few swift steps brought her home, and she disappeared into the low, vine-covered house, just as Oscar Raynor passed by the rustic seat under the palm tree where the girl he loved had so lately heard and believed Irene Balfour's false words against him.

He lifted from the ground a silken bookmark that had fluttered from her book, and with a soft smile, kissed the ribbon and placed it tenderly in a little wallet that she had given him.

It was early morning—that fateful morning upon which, all unconscious of evil, Oscar Raymond had arranged to meet Lillian Burton under the twisted olive tree.

There, at the appointed place, with the dew-spangled grass and gorgeous wild-flowers around, he stood, and beside him stood the girl.

There, too, was Eve Agacio—tall, white and terrible as any Nemesis. But although she saw the two whom she considered guilty of immeasurable treachery, she had placed herself where they could not see her.

And as she looked, Eve thought, with an unwonted pang of fierce, sharp jealousy, that she had never realized how very lovely this English girl was; had not noticed how dazzlingly fair and tender her complexion was, how bright the luxuriant golden hair that now fell in tangled rings from under the pale-blue scarf which was thrown around her head; had never appreciated the violet depths of her glowing eyes, nor the delicate, clear-cut contours of her throat and cheek.

"Poor little one, cannot you have patience just a little longer—a very little longer?" he said. "Lillian—"

"There! I can have patience no longer, and I will not!" she said, stamping her foot in the grass. "Already she suspects, I'm sure, and I'm tired of deceiving, weary of making believe and pretending. Oscar, listen!"

Then they drew away beyond the reach of even Eve's strained hearing; but she could still see the girl's excited, energetic gestures, until gradually Lillian became calmer under her companion's words.

Then Eve saw Lillian Burton suddenly, with satisfied, eager face, joyously acquiesce in a proposition from Oscar, and quickly, with a nod and a glance around, dart away over the grove like a fawn.

Eve's face had grown more rigid as she watched—more white it could not grow—and as her lover drew near her hiding place again, she clutched more firmly and drew from her bosom a long, glittering dagger, and poised it ready to strike.

"He shall be mine, if dead—not hers!" she murmured.

And at that moment Lillian looked back and kissed her hand as she flew on, and he waved his, with a smile, in response.

"Shall I not take care of her till he comes back, dear little sister? How artless she is, and how helpless!"

Then Eve Agacio fell against the tree-trunk that had shielded her from view, and as the shaken leaves rustled noiselessly she slipped to the ground and lay prone at her lover's feet.

"Eve!" he cried, in amazement and terror, as he knelt beside her. "Oh, my darling, my treasure, what is this?"

"Do not touch me! Do not come near me! Stand away!" she shrieked, and staggered to her feet.

But in spite of her words he strove to draw her, dishevelled and wild, into the protection of his sheltering arms.

She struggled and cast him off, then raised the weapon again.

"I am a murderer!" she said. With a quick strong movement he wrenched the dagger from her hand.

"Whom have you murdered?" he said, regarding the weapon with some curiosity.

She looked at him with horrified eyes.

"I meant to kill you!" she cried, wildly. "That was why I brought the dagger here, and had you not called Lillian Burton 'sister' just when you did I would have plunged it into your heart."

Oscar gazed at her in great bewilderment and distress which at first kept him speechless.

"You meant this for me, Eve?" he said, at last. "Why, what can you mean? Sister? Well, Lillian is my sister as much as being my brother's wife can make her so. It was a secret marriage, Eve, but I was witness to it, and when my brother, Lieutenant Raynor, joined his ship and left home, he gave his wife into my care. She needs it, for she is still under the guardianship of a most inconsiderate relative, who has always opposed the marriage. Ah, she should have made a confidant of you! I wish she had. And were you really jealous of little Lily—you, my gorgeous tropical flower? Oh, Eve, dearest and ever beloved, how could you have doubted my love for you?"

There was reproach but no anger in his words, and as he drew the quivering form to his side, there was even amusement in his smile.

Eve looked up at him with an expression so despairing and woe-begone that Oscar felt a vague anxiety.

"What now troubles you, dear one?" he asked.

"Oh, you do not—you cannot—realise the horror, the wickedness, of my intended dead!"

"I think I do. Believe me, I appreciate my good fortune in calling Lily 'sister.'"

"Ah, it is angelic for you to make light of it, but I cannot ask you to forgive it. I do not know that you ought to forgive such unfathomable evil."

"I think I ought. Anyway, I do. Darling, do not even try to ask; I forgive you without."

Her eyes became suffused with tears, and before Oscar was aware of her intention she was kneeling in the dewy grass before him.

He bent down and raised her, placing her head upon his shoulder.

"Ah, Eve, dearest and best, don't do that!" he said, softly, but with a tone of anguish that she had never heard before. "Here is your place—next to my heart; never, never at my feet!"

And never more was Eve tempted to believe that that heart was not hers wholly and for all time.

LONDON has the distinction of being the first city to use coal. This was in the latter part of the twelfth century. Its use was prohibited shortly after its introduction, and one man was actually executed for violating this law.

## FACETIE.

THE heathen in their blindness bow down to wood and stone. After they have been converted they learn to worship gold.

"What an old umbrella Brattles carries!" "Remarkable, isn't it? It is evidently one of the shades of his ancestors."

The sphere of woman may indeed be bounded, but she has to stop when she comes to a barbed-wire fence.

WHEN a man is in love he thinks his girl's name is the sweetest in the world, but when they are married he thinks it is too old-fashioned to give the children.

CUSTOMER: "Look here, I haven't had these trousers a week, and they bag at the knees." Tailor: "That is not my fault, sir, you shouldn't be so ardent in your proposals."

"You must be careful, my son; a straw will often turn a man from the path of temperance." "Yes, father; especially when it is inserted in a mint julep."

A SUNDAY SCHOOL superintendent startled his school by remarking, "Yes, children; and nearly all the king's army, when they woke in the morning, found they were dead."

"These are hard times," said the young debt collector. "Every place I went to-day but one I was requested to call again, and that was when I dropped in to see my girl."

LADY: "I wish to get a birthday present for my husband." Clerk: "How long married?" Lady: "Ten years." Clerk: "Bargain counter, to the right."

At RAMSGATE.—Teddy (aged ten): "Effie, won't you be my little wife?" Effie (aged eight): "Yes, Teddy, I will." Teddy: "Then take off my boots. I'm going to paddle, and you stay here and mind 'em."

"Why didn't you put a watch-pocket in my new waistcoat? I sent you my old one as a pattern." "I thought you wouldn't need one, sir, as I found the pawn ticket for your watch in one of the pockets."

SALD Timothy, "Lay hands suddenly on no man." He was possibly smirking from the effects of an "How are you?" with a simoniacal slap on the shoulder when he gave utterance to this admonition.

"I WISH you couldn't call your name your own," he said, gently. "Why?" "Because," and for a moment there was no sound but the splash of the sea, "I wish my name were your own."

"YOU never towld me yer husband wor a sailor, Mrs. Donahue. 'Yis; he's been around the worl'd." "Clear round to China on the opposite side, was he?" "To be sure." "Worr, but it must be asy he feels to get up here on top waner more."

"Few people," says an exchange, "realise what a wonderfully delicate structure the human ear is." That's a fact. They bang away at the ear drum as though it were a bass drum, and bore into it as they would bore into an oaken plank.

MAUD: "There are now over four thousand vocations open to woman." Clara: "Dear me! What are they?" Maud: "Let—me—see. One of them is marriage, and another is—is—Dear me! I've forgotten the others."

"PAW," said little Tommy Figg, on being scolded, "I heard Mr. Watt say that great men's sons never did any good. I ain't a great man's son, am I?" Up to a late hour Mr. Figg's mind had not found a sufficiently diplomatic answer.

"NELLIE, if you had lived in the days of Annanias and Sapphira, you would have been dead long ago," said her younger brother. "I am sure, Bobby, I never told what wasn't true in my life. How can you be so unkind?" said Nellie. "Why, they lived about eighteen hundred years ago. You wouldn't have hung on so long as that, would you?"

MAMMA: "Did you have a nice time in the park?" Boy: "Oh, yes." "What did you do?" "Oh, lots of things—smashed some flowers, an' made faces at the park keeper, an' dodged the horses, an' threw stones at th' keep-off-th'grass' boards, and everything."

"If you don't like my way of doing things," said Mrs. Tartley, "why did you marry me?" "Because," answered Mr. Tartley, "I didn't know when I was well off." "Because you weren't well off, and you thought I was—if the truth were known," was the retort.

"CAN dogs find their way home from a distance?" is a question frequently asked. It's according to the dog. If it's one you want to get rid of, he can find his way back from Africa. If it's a good one, he's apt to get lost if he goes round the corner.

FATHER (impatiently): "Where is your mother?" Little Pet: "Upstairs, reading." "Huh! Reading novels, I suppose, when she ought to be—" "No. She's readin' a perfumed letter she found in your inside vest-pocket." "Hem! Tell her I've gone out to buy her some new novels."

"REGINALD," she said to a wealthy young dandy who had been paying his attentions to her, "I would like to ask you one very serious question." "What is it, my dear?" he replied. "Would you object to marry mamma if I refused you? You see we really don't want to lose you."

MR. JONES (who has married a rich widow): "Isn't it dreadful how those starving people in Russia live off each other?" Mrs. Jones: "Oh, it's nothing when you once get used to it. I used to kick when your mother and your sister and all the rest of them came to live off me, but I've got so used to it now that I never mention it."

ENTHUSIASTIC but short-sighted Lady Artist: "My good man, what are those beautiful waving objects near those trees, rivaling the latter themselves in grace and beauty of outline, making such a beautiful variety in the landscape, and seeming to bang 'twixt earth and heaven?" Labourer (gruffly): "My shirts!"

A suit had gone against the defendant, who arose and gave his opinion of the judgment, and was fined ten dollars for contempt of court. A bill was handed to the clerk which proved to be twenty dollars. "I have no change," said the clerk, tendering it to the offender. "Never mind about the other ten dollars," was the retort. "Keep it; I'll take it out in contempt."

"WHEN I was once in danger from a tiger," said an old East Indian veteran, "I tried sitting down and staring at him, as I had no weapons." "How did it work?" asked a bystander. "Perfectly; the tiger didn't even offer to touch me." "Strange! How did you account for it?" "Well, sometimes I've thought it was because I sat down on a branch of a very tall tree."

SLICK (to Blossom) — "Is this Mr. Bloomer's office?" Blossom: "No. His office is across the hall." Slick (leaving the door open as he walks out): "Thank you, sir." "Hey! Come back and close that door! Haven't you any doors in your house?" "Yes, sir; but they all have springs on 'em." "Allow me to show you, sir, my patent double-backed action door-spring. It closes the door without a bang, and is warranted to last a life-time."

RECORDED (to prisoner): "How do you live?" "I ain't particular, as the oyster said when they asked him if he'd be roasted or fried." "We don't want to hear what the oyster said. What do you follow?" "Anything that comes in my way, as the locomotive said when it ran over a man. "Your business?" "That's various, as the cat said when she stole the chicken." "That comes nearer to the line, I suppose?" "Altogether in my line, as the rope said when choking the pirate." "If I hear any more comparisons, I will give you twelve months." "I'm done, as the beefsteak said to the cook."

"I FEEL sorry for poor Jones," remarked Gus De Smith to Gilhooly. "What is the master with him?" "He is colour blind. Yesterday he mistook my nice new green silk umbrella for his own brown one." "That is to prove what I have often said, that it is not right to judge a man by his umbrella, for he may have stolen it."

A LECTURER in Cork once began an address by remarking very solemnly: "Parents, you may have children, or if not, your daughters may have." And concluded with: "There is no man, woman or child in this house, who has arrived at the age of fifty years, but that has felt these mighty truths thundering through their minds for canturier."

FAKIR: "Here you are, gentlemen, the greatest invention of the age." Passengers (clapping to him): "What is it?" Fakir: "A magnetized key-hole plate for front doors. It would attract an ordinary steel key from a distance of two feet. All you have to do to find the key-hole is to take out your key and hang on to it." Three men were injured in the crowd that gathered to buy.

"I HAVE had my diamond engagement ring three mon the now, and you can't imagine how economical it is," she said to her friend in the street car. "Why, dear, how do you make that out?" "Haven't worn a pair of gloves since I had it." "But," asked the other, "it doesn't keep your hands warm does it?" "Doesn't it? Just try one yourself. You've no idea how comfortable it is."

"WILLIAM," she sighed, and he hung upon her words with the grip of a freshman testing his strength for an anthropometrical chart. "William, why am I like a broken basket?" "Ab," he said, "I cannot tell." "Because, William," she murmured, and her voice had the far-away sound of the wind moaning on the freshman fence, "I need a clasp." And then, hang it, the Hibernian Hebe came in to light the lamps.

THE professor was much annoyed by the persistent yawning of a large, fleshy member of the class who sat on a front seat. "I am sorry," he said, dropping the thread of his discourse for a moment, "that my young friend directly in front is unable to take any interest in my remarks." "Don't mind me, professor," exclaimed the youth, with a terrible yawn. "I'm always this way. I'd gaps just the same as if it was a funeral."

A YOUTH at school in Scotland, who lacked musical talent, and whose voice consequently jarred during the singing lesson, was always allowed a holiday on singing days. His mother paid a visit to the school to inquire into the matter. In answer to her query as to why her son was sent home on such occasions, the teacher said, "Why, because he has no ear." "What!" she exclaimed, "nae ear? Did anybody ever hear the like o' that? Nae ear! Why, he has a lug like a saucier, mon."

"WHAT is an inward monitor?" asked the teacher of the class. "I don't know," responded a tow-headed boy, "but I know what an outward monitor is." "Well, what is that?" inquired the teacher, with a degree of curiosity. "It's one of the iron-bound ships that knocks the stuffs out of everything for forty-seven miles around, ma'am; that's what it is," and the boy puffed over his answer as if he had carried in four buckets of water hard running.

SOJOURNERS in barbarous countries find the natives illustrating their talk with comparisons which sound rather grim to civilized ears. An employé of the Congo Free State writes that he had in his service a black man who was almost always accompanied by an ape, of whom he seemed very fond. One day the native appeared without the animal. "What have you done with your monkey?" asked the white man. "Monkey? Me ate him up!" "You ate him! Are monkeys good to eat, then?" "Um—taste same like white man!" said the negro, with an air of keen appreciation.

## SOCIETY.

TRANSPARENT parasols are now the fashion. The Queen is exceedingly fond of tapioca puddings.

The Maharajah of Baroda and his whole Court are total abstainers.

The essence of orange-blossoms is said to make a capital drink during the hotter months.

LADY doctors have been permitted to "walk the wards" by the directors of the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary.

It is curious to note that it is the bachelors in the House of Commons who interest themselves most persistently in the woman's suffrage question.

It has been arranged that King Alexander of Servia is to meet his mother, Queen Nathalie, at Spa, where, at any rate, politics are at a discount and the police ubiquitous.

The Princess of Wales and her daughters have greatly lightened their mourning habiliments, especially the young Princesses, who wear black coats and skirts with white and light grey blouses.

The Queen, the Prince of Wales, and Princess Louis were amongst the earliest of those who congratulated the Poet Laureate, by letter or telegram, upon his eighty-third birthday.

It is an entire mistake to suppose that the Princess Marie of Edinburgh is a member of the Greek Church. She has been brought up in the principles and faith of the Church of England—in the religion of her father, not that of her mother.

One of the most striking novelties in footgear is the Mephistophelean hose of scarlet and crimson, made to match the low shoes of red or patent leather. Sometimes the stockings are toned down with cloaks of black, or a powdering of embroidered flowerets.

The statement is incorrect that Sir David Evans is the first Welsh Lord Mayor, for there have been at least seven or eight aldermen of the same nationality who have held the Chief Magistracy of the City in the seven centuries of the Corporation's existence, though none in the current century.

The Empress Frederick returns to Berlin early in October to superintend the preparations for the marriage of the Princess Margaret, whose trousseau is already well in hand. Next year the Empress's grandson, the Crown Prince, will accompany his father on his yachting expedition to the North Sea and other autumnal excursions, as the Emperor desires what he calls his practical education to be no longer delayed.

The Queen has been in excellent health and spirits all the time she has been at Osborne, and the anticipatory rumour that Her Majesty will hold no more Drawing rooms personally need not cause the slightest disquietude to those who are always loyally anxious about the Queen. Her Majesty is now seventy-three, and it is, of course, advisable that she should take life as quietly as may be possible in her exalted and responsible position.

The Queen has just had her likeness taken again by a Ryde photographer, and Her Majesty looked ever so smiling and pleasant as the plate was exposed; but her Royal eyes blinked, and the clever face-taker had to try again, when the queenly face was taken to perfection, with just a little smile and a firm, kindly expression. A great resemblance can be traced between Her Majesty's last portrait, and the familiar one of the Queen as Princess Victoria fondling a lamb, which again, is very like the portrait Her Majesty had taken when she was sitting on the beach at Broadstairs.

## STATISTICS.

"BIG BEN" weighs thirteen tons. The speed of a wild duck is ninety miles an hour.

The distance from the north pole to the equator, measured along the earth's surface, is 6,000 miles.

More than 200,000 typewriting machines of all makes have been put upon the market during the past ten years.

An English scientist has made a calculation about the time it will take to fill the world with all the people it will hold. The present population of the globe is supposed to be about 1,467,000,000, and he estimates that the maximum of the inhabitants that can be sustained on the entire land surface of the earth is 5,994,000,000, and that this figure will be reached A.D. 2072.

## GEMS.

You can't learn too much, but you can half learn too much.

The man who never makes any mistakes never does any work that will outlive him.

Like a beautiful flower, full of colour but without perfume, are the fine but fruitless words of him who does not accordingly.

EVERY day is a little life, and our whole life is but a day repeated. Those, therefore, that dare lose a day are dangerously prodigal; those that dare misspend it are desperate.

IF we take people as we find them, welcoming all their good points and passing over the others, and being kind and generous to all, we shall come much nearer to the truth about them than if we labour to make a critical analysis of minds and hearts of which we can see only a few fragments.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

EVERTON TOFFEE, &c.—Put a teacupful of water and one pound of sugar into a brass pan, with a quarter of a pound of butter beat into a cream; when the sugar is dissolved add the butter, and keep stirring the mixture over the fire until it sets, when a little is poured on to a buttered dish, and, just before the toffee is done, add six drops of essence of lemon. White powdered sugar is used for this.

SALMON CROQUETTES.—One can of salmon, one egg, well beaten, one-half cup of fine bread crumbs, salt, cayenne pepper, nutmeg, juice of half a lemon; drain off the liquor and mince the fish; melt and work in the butter, season, and, if necessary, moisten with a little of the liquor; add the crumbs; form the paste into rolls, which flour quickly, and stand them in a cold place for an hour; fry in hot fat and serve on a hot platter, garnished with fresh parsley.

SWEET OMELETTE.—Two eggs, one tablespoonful fine sugar, one tablespoonful water, one teaspoonful vanilla or other flavouring, a tablespoonful jam, half ounce butter. Put the water and sugar in a small saucepan to boil for a few minutes. Beat the yolks of the eggs till they look creamy, and pour the boiling sugar over them, stirring vigorously for a few minutes; add the vanilla. Then beat the whites to snow and stir them in gently. Melt the butter in an omelette pan, pour in the omelette and put it into a quiet oven for about ten minutes till it has risen and is cooked. Turn it out on a dish; put the jam in the middle; double it over, dust it with fine sugar and serve. This omelette can be cooked over the fire till it sets, then in front of the fire till it browns instead of in the oven.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

LEMONS are being used in soap-making.

In Japan the women load the vessels.

IMPORTATION of patent medicines is prohibited in Turkey.

There is a street in one of the cities in Germany which is paved with rubber.

On account of its monosyllabic quality, Chinese is the easiest language for telephoning.

It is urged by a French physician that raw milk is one of our most dangerous commodities.

At Bombay all the Hindoo sentries salute any passing black cat, thinking it may possibly be the soul of an English officer.

There are three places known where green snow is found. One of these places is near Mt. Hecla, Iceland, another fourteen miles east of the mouth of the Obi, and the third near Quito, South America.

THE oldest hotel in Switzerland, and probably the oldest in the world, is the Hotel of the Three Kings, at Basle. Among its guests in 1026 were the Emperor Conrad II., his son, Henry III., and Rudolph, the last King of Burgundy.

THE latest of all these machines is the automatic messenger-box. Drop in a penny, take out the writing materials, let down the desk, and write. Meanwhile a telegraph boy is being called by an electric communication working automatically. He arrives as you finish your note, and delivers it at once.

THAT the world was inhabited long before authentic history began is now one of the generally accepted facts. There are said to be more than three thousand prehistoric buildings in Sardinia. They are almost all in the fertile districts, and are built in groups which are separated from one another by wide and generally barren places.

THE little King of Spain has smoked his first cigarette! His Majesty purloined it, it is said, from his mother's box, and astonished his governesses by the ease with which he took his initial puff at the national concoction. Report is silent as to the consequences of the performance, but it is safe to suppose that this six year-old monarch felt somewhat uncomfortable.

WHEN flies sting sharply, and ants may be seen making haste with their tiny burdens; when the donkeys bray unusually, and the cows cluster in corners of the fields before milking time; when the pigs pick up straws and carry them about with lively interest, as if they had some business with them, or wished to learn if straws really do show the way the wind blows; when the dog is heavy with sleep, and the cat seems possessed to wash her face; when all or any of these signs are seen they are not in vain, for it is sure not to be a dry time and rain is on the way.

IN Hindoo countries where our clocks are imported they are kept and used as ornaments about the room, while for keeping account of time the natives frequently do as they have been accustomed to do all their lives, and measure it in their own way. Thus at some of the out-of-the-way railway stations where English trains stop, a little copper pot in which a small hole has been bored is placed in a tub full of water. It is supposed that it will take an hour's time to fill the little copper pot with the water that leaks through the hole. At any rate, when the pot is filled and sinks, they believe that an hour has gone by, and the policeman at the station picks it out, empties it, and puts it on the top of the water again to measure more time. But if he happens to be talking to some one or to be deep in a nap, he never makes any allowance for the time the little pot has been left under water. He begins to measure the next hour from the moment he picks it up.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

DUDLEY.—Dudley Castle is in Staffordshire.

JUBILEE.—Queen Victoria was born May 24, 1819.

POOR JOE.—The illegitimate children have no claim.

DAME DURDEN.—The Thursdays in December, 1884, were 4th, 11th, 18th, and 25th.

CONSTANTIA.—Not necessarily, but under some circumstances.

WILL.—Get your ears and throat examined to find out what is the cause.

T. F.—The offices you name are, so far as we know, perfectly reliable.

DURCR.—Newcastle is the capital of the county of Northumberland.

A SUFFERER.—No doctor can give a decided opinion without a careful examination.

COCKNEY.—The fountains are supplied with water from the water-mains.

M. D.—Mr. Lowe's match tax proposal was made and withdrawn in April, 1871.

DICK.—It is not legal for a man to marry his deceased brother's widow.

OUT OF HEALTH.—Live a healthy life, take moderate exercise in the open air, and do not over-eat.

ANTONIO.—We cannot advise you, knowing nothing whatever of the shipping firm you mention.

INTERFERENCE.—Lord Coleridge, the Lord Chief Justice, is a member of the Church of England.

IN A BAD WAY.—We cannot put your teeth back again. Go to a good dentist and have a proper set made.

BARTETTE.—Impossible to state origin of either name, but Hogg is Scotch; probably originally French.

LIZZIE.—We are not aware that sea, mountain, or moor, or, in fact, any other air, are responsible for insanity.

POLLY IN DISTRESS.—A landlord cannot raise a tenant's rent at any time he pleases. He must give notice, the same as notice to quit.

T. D. W.—It cannot be done; the colour has been quite washed out, and the only way to restore it would be to paint it again.

JACK.—If holidays are not provided for in your indentures you may try your claim by action in the County Court.

FANCIFUL.—You cannot go to San Francisco for less than £10, all told; this includes incidental expenses, such as food on journey.

GOSSIP.—The late Earl Granville was twice married—in 1846 and in 1865. The present earl, a minor, was born in 1872.

GORRIE.—Sic a sentence as "hanging, drawing, and quartering" has not been possible in this country during the present century.

A. T.—All that the witnesses have to see is the testator writing his name. They witness the "signature," not the will.

MAMIE.—It is only a silly nervous habit, which you must break yourself of. No medicine can help you. The more you notice it the worse it will get.

TOMMY TUCKER.—There is no book such as you describe in existence; a great deal of law is not to be found in any books.

TROUBLES.—A man who wishes to emigrate is not legally bound to allow his wife a separate maintenance if she refuse to go with him.

S. A.—Impossible that any English lawyer could hold a Scotch legal appointment; the law of the two countries is altogether dissimilar.

ANNETTE.—Monmouthshire is one of the forty counties of England, but for certain purposes it is treated as one of the counties of Wales.

JUDY.—The Queen has power to dissolve Parliament at the request of the Prime Minister. To dissolve at her own caprice would be absolute government.

M. U.—The Severn Tunnel is about four-and-a-half miles long, of which about two-and-a-quarter miles are under the waters of the Severn.

LORELIE.—There is nothing else that will do what you ask. If you wish to keep your hair thick, you will have to leave off twisting it up in order to produce curls.

JACQUES.—The late Government reduced the tea duty. There is no duty on sugar, nor has the Government proposed to reimpose the sugar tax.

INQUIRER.—There is no society of the name to be found in the London Directory. Perhaps the office may be elsewhere.

AMBITIOUS.—We fear that it would be difficult to get an editor to print your first attempt, let alone pay for it.

DOLLY DAISY DIMPLE.—Take the triangular pieces of carpet-corner out from the corners, sew the long edges together and bind them. They make pretty rugs.

F. B.—Scientific men now declare that eating before sleeping is of great benefit, and that a bowl of bread and milk, a mug of beer and a few biscuits, or a saucer of oatmeal before retiring will in a short time result in an increase of weight, strength, and general tone.

MINA.—Marriage between second cousins is not illegal; marriage between any cousins is perfectly legal.

TOP.—The "United Kingdom" includes Great Britain and Ireland; that is, England and Scotland (as Great Britain) united to Ireland by the Act of 1801.

M. N. B.—You had better take your songs to a music publisher, and get his opinion, but poetry is a drug in the market.

BUNNY.—Apply to the steward on board, if you are referring to a river boat; or to the shore steward if you mean an ocean-going steamer.

INQUIRER.—No, cannot give precise answer; should say the fare will amount to about 40/- all told, including boat, railway, and coach fare; there is no cheap route.

C. G.—Somersetshire produces best Cheddar cheese; Leicestershire, Stilton; and Cheshire and Gloucestershire are also famous for their cheese-making.

H. T. S.—House of Commons, Westminster; that is the surest address for all M.P.'s while Parliament is in session; letters are at once forwarded to absent members.

MIRA.—A special license is granted by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and costs about £20. When it has been granted, the ceremony may be solemnized anywhere and at any hour.

## THREE KISSES OF FAREWELL.

THREE, only three, my darling,  
Separate, solemn, slow;  
Not like the swift and joyous ones  
We used to know  
When we kissed because we loved each other,  
Simply to taste love's sweets,  
And lavished our kisses as summer  
Lavishes heats;  
But as they kiss whose hearts are wrung  
When hope and fear are spent,  
And nothing is left to give, except  
A sacrament!

First of the three, my darling,  
Is sacred unto pain;  
We have hurt each other often,  
We shall again;  
When we pine because we miss each other,  
And do not understand  
How the written words are so much colder  
Than eye and hand,  
I kiss thee, dear, for any such pain  
Which we may give or take;  
Buried, forgiven, before it comes,  
For our love's sake.

The second kiss, my darling,  
Is full of joy's sweet thrill;  
We have blessed each other always,  
We always will.  
We shall reach until we find each other  
Past all of time and space;  
We shall listen till we hear each other  
In every place.  
The earth is full of messengers  
Which love sends to and fro;  
I kiss thee, darling, for all joy  
Which we shall know!

The last kiss, O my darling,  
My love—I cannot see  
Through my tears as I remember  
What it may be.  
We may die and never see each other,  
Die with no time to give  
Any sign that our hearts are faithful  
To die as we.

Tokens of what they will not see

Who see our parting breath,

This one last kiss, my darling,

Seals the seal of death.

S. H.

VALOUR.—We have no means of getting answers to either of the questions; as for the second, we don't believe there is any authentic record of the nationality of the man who first scaled Gibraltar rock.

A. R.—Detectives are chosen from among the men already serving in the police force—those who show aptitude in that direction having preference. You would first require to join as an ordinary policeman.

BIRDIE.—There is what is called the oral system of teaching the dumb, by which the latter are enabled to speak though they do not hear; they watch the words formed by the lips of their teachers.

S. Y.—Stokers can enlist for five or twelve years, but twelve-year men are preferred, and they have the option of re-entering for other ten years, which qualifies for pension.

PIRETO.—The 7th Highlanders were first in the assault on Tel-el-Kebir, though the first to mount the breastwork of the trenches was Donald Cameron, of the 7th.

MOON-STRUCK.—The same side of the moon is always turned towards us, for as she goes round the earth she slowly turns on her own axis, and makes one revolution in exactly the same time as she takes to go round us.

EPPO.—The first steam vessels to reach New York from Great Britain were the *Sirius* and the *Great Western*. The *Sirius*, a ship of 700 tons, sailed from Cork, April 4, 1838, and the *Great Western*, 1,340 tons, left Bristol three days later. They arrived on April 23, the *Sirius* in the morning and the *Great Western* in the afternoon.

BUNNY.—A list of all fairs in England and Wales appears in "Whitaker's Almanack," which you would probably see at a reference library; and also in other principal almanacks published in this country.

MECHANIC.—Wages run from 7/- to 10/- per day, and board and lodging may be set down roughly at 20/- per week in South Africa; clothing is dear; and though some small demand for mechanics is announced, we think considerable difficulties must be experienced in finding situations.

YOUNG 'U.S.'—Find out the shore steward, and ascertain whether he is willing to hire you as an assistant seagoing steward; don't know any other course open to you, and this means that you are going to waste a part of your life that should be given to apprenticeship to some trade likely to be useful to you in after life.

SCOT.—There has not been a time within the historical period in Scotland where men in any district of it averaged 6 feet 6 inches in height; Highlanders are not conspicuously tall; the Islesmen are, but taken over all the lowlanders of Scotland probably average greater height than the Highlanders.

JOHN BULL.—Do not attempt to "get up" the language, the result would be ignominious failure; you will find everywhere among shopkeepers a disposition to converse with you in English, often with success; but put yourself in Cock's hands and all difficulty will be removed; your guide then does all the talking.

YOUNG MOTHER.—The finger-nails of children require constant cutting, or they will break and become distorted. It is not wise to cut them quite close to the quick, as the end of the finger becomes clubbed in consequence. They should also be out round and well cut at the corners, whereby the convexity of the surface is preserved, which is considered a beauty.

BOB.—There is absolutely no inducement whatever to anyone to emigrate to Australia at this moment; with exception of Western Australia, all the colonies out there are practically shut against working men, trade being depressed, and many going about unemployed; Western Australia at latest date had a small demand for men of the building trade; you may let that induce you to go there, but we do not advise it.

H. E.—The greatest depth to which a diver has descended is 34 fathoms, or 204 feet, an enormous depth when everything is taken into consideration, and not one diver in a hundred could sustain the awful pressure, which is computed to be 88½ lbs. to the square inch. The Admiralty limit their divers to 20 fathoms or 120 feet; 25 fathoms, or 150 feet, is considered a sufficiently trying "dip."

A. G. R.—The cubic space required by sanitary regulation for an adult in the sleeping apartment is 400 feet; if you have that, and your bedroom is not shut in by surrounding buildings, it may not be absolutely necessary to open your window at night, but a good rule to go upon is to have it lowered about an inch at all times, no matter what your space may be, as that permits the foul air to flow out as speedily as it is generated.

EMILY.—There is a great deal to be said about soaking clothes overnight. If they are merely plunged in cold water, it is better to leave them unsoaked; but if each garment is carefully looked over, the fruit and coffee stains removed with boiling water, and all the other stains treated as they should be, and the clothes then soaked in cold water overnight, a little soap being rubbed on the wrists and other parts of the garments which are especially soiled, it will prove a success.

CONSTANT READER.—The origin of guilds is "lost in the mists of antiquity." Trading guilds flourished in Phoenicia and Greece, and the Roman Colleges and Sodalities were religious, social, or funeral guilds. The guild is found in Anglo-Saxon England, but rather as a fraternity for feasting, preserving courtesy and order, seeing to the performance of funeral rites of deceased members, and so on. It was when the first brunt of the Norman Conquest had spent its force that the Craft Guild—the association of a particular trade—and the Merchant Guild—the federation of all trades—began to rise into importance.

BELLA.—There are pastes and pastes, but the number of those that stick compared to the number that do not is insignificant. The following recipe is for a paste that is asserted will stick to almost anything:—Take three parts of sugar of lead, three parts of alum, five parts of gum arabic and sixteen parts of wheat flour. Dissolve the gum arabic in two quarts of warm water. When cold stir in the wheat flour and add the sugar of lead and the alum, both of which, by the way, must be first dissolved in warm water. Cook the mixture until it shows signs of boiling. When cool the paste is ready for use.

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